

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA
[York, South Carolina]

HEARING # 20-11857

MARCH 5, 2020

6:00 P.M.

DOCKET NO. 2019-290-WS:

Blue Granite Water Company - Application for Approval to Adjust
Rate Schedules and Increase Rates

TRANSCRIPT OF TESTIMONY
AND PROCEEDINGS

VOLUME 10 OF 10

HEARING BEFORE: Comer H. 'Randy' RANDALL, *Chairman*; Florence
P. BELSER, *Interim Vice Chairman*; and COMMISSIONERS John
E. 'Butch' HOWARD, Thomas J. 'Tom' ERVIN, Swain E.
WHITFIELD, and O'Neal HAMILTON

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Legal Advisory Staff

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Public Information Officer; and Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM/M-
GNSC, Court Reporter

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MICHAEL KENDREE, ESQUIRE, representing YORK
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JIM KNOWLTON, appearing *pro se*, INTERVENOR

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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INTERVENOR

NANETTE EDWARDS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, and
ALEXANDER W. KNOWLES, ESQUIRE, representing the SOUTH
CAROLINA OFFICE OF REGULATORY STAFF

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Good evening, everyone. Welcome. We're glad you're here tonight. We're here to listen to you and your concerns, and so thank you for coming.

I want to make sure you know who is here. I'm going to introduce our Commissioners who have come. To my far left, from the First District, Commissioner Butch Howard; next to him, Commissioner O'Neal Hamilton from the Seventh District. On my far right, Commissioner Florence Belser, from Second District; Commissioner Tom Ervin, from the Fourth District; Commissioner Swain Whitfield, from the Fifth District. And from the Sixth District, Justin Williams, Commissioner Williams is in Iraq serving our country right now, so –

[Applause]

Before we begin, I want to take this – we run every hearing like a court proceeding, so I want to take appearances from the parties.

MR. WELLBORN: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the company, my name is Sam Wellborn. We also have here from the company its President, Mr. Don Denton, as well as Vice President of Operations,

1 Mr. Bryce Mendenhall.

2 And I would encourage members of the public,
3 if there's a specific issue that needs addressing
4 by the company, they are free to approach members
5 of the company and their staff, who are also here
6 in the wings, I believe, just waiting to help
7 customers out. Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you. Welcome.

9 Let's go to this end.

10 **MS. DOVER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am
11 Becky Dover; I'm the Assistant Consumer Advocate,
12 with the Department of Consumer Affairs. We
13 represent the consumer interest in utility cases,
14 including this one.

15 [Applause]

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Let me ask everybody,
17 please hold your applause like till the very end,
18 so -

19 [Laughter]

20 - it'll - this will go much smoother, I
21 promise you.

22 **MR. KNOWLES:** Alex Knowles, on behalf of the
23 Office of Regulatory Staff.

24 **MR. KNOWLTON:** I'm Intervenor Jim Knowlton,
25 from the Foxwood subdivision.

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MR. KENDREE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Michael Kendree, on behalf of the Intervenor York County.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Welcome. Welcome to all of you.

Okay, Mr. Knowles, you're going to do Office of Regulatory Staff?

MR. KNOWLES: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good evening. And thank you for coming out tonight. I'm going to take just a couple of minutes to explain the process for this hearing. Again, my name's Alex Knowles; I'm an attorney with the Office of Regulatory Staff. With me tonight is Nanette Edwards, ORS's Executive Director.

The Public Service Commission is hosting this hearing tonight. The agency I work for, the Office of Regulatory Staff, is a separate State agency from the Public Service Commission. And you'll hear the Office of Regulatory Staff referred to by its acronym "ORS."

The Commission is charged with making the final decision in the Application. ORS, along with the Consumer Advocate, is charged with representing the public interest and making recommendations to

1 the Commission.

2 This hearing is for you to share your thoughts
3 about Blue Granite Water Company's request to
4 increase its rates. The Commission scheduled this
5 night hearing because they know that this is a
6 significant matter and they know what you have to
7 say is important. Please know that, if you speak
8 tonight, what you say will become part of the
9 official record. You will be sworn in and your
10 testimony will be recorded by Ms. Jo Wheat, the
11 court reporter. The Commission will keep in mind
12 what you say as they deliberate and make a decision
13 on this case. All of the parties presented
14 testimony and evidence to the Commission during the
15 merits hearing, which began February 26th and ended
16 Monday, March 2nd. The final decision in this case
17 will be issued by the Commission no later than
18 April 9th.

19 If you speak tonight, I may ask you some
20 questions, the attorneys for the other parties may
21 ask you some questions, and the Commission could
22 also ask you questions. Please don't get offended
23 if we do; it's simply because we want to learn more
24 about what you're saying. On the other hand,
25 please don't get offended if we don't.

[Laughter]

The important thing is that tonight is about hearing what you have to say.

As for the Commission, the Commissioners and Commission Staff are required to follow the same rules as a judge. So, while the Commission can ask you questions, they can't answer questions. So please don't get frustrated if you state questions during your testimony and no one answers.

I'd also like to mention that with me tonight from the Office of Regulatory Staff is Ryder Thompson, of ORS' Utilities Rates Department, and also, in the hallway is Ms. Takisha Waller. And you're welcome tonight to talk with Ryder or Takisha at any time during the hearing. And if you want to talk with myself or with Nanette, we will stick around after, for as long as it takes to speak with everybody who has anything they want to talk about. I'll note that I can't answer questions while testimony's being taken, but, again, after testimony, happy to talk. And if you would like to contact our agency later, ORS has a 1-800 number for Consumer Services, which is 1-800-922-1531. 1-800-922-1531. And our Staff is available from at least 8:30 to 5. And if you

1 don't get someone, leave a message. I promise you
2 that we're going to return your call.

3 So with that, please remember, again, we're
4 all here to listen to you tonight. During your
5 three-minute allotment of time, you'll be treated
6 with courtesy and respect; and please be
7 considerate and respectful to the Commission as you
8 direct your remarks to them. Thank you again for
9 being here. Thank you for your attention during
10 these brief remarks.

11 And, Mr. Chairman, turning back to you, I'd
12 ask that the sign-in sheet for tonight be entered
13 into the record as a hearing exhibit.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Knowles.
15 The sign-in sheet tonight will be entered as
16 Hearing Exhibit No. 43.

17 I'm going to turn it over, and we've got some
18 other folks I'm going to introduce in a minute, but
19 our staff attorney Mr. David Butler is going to
20 give a few instructions, as well. Some of them may
21 be the same, but – so bear with us.

22 **MR. BUTLER:** Thank you, very much, Mr.
23 Chairman, members of the Commission.

24 I'm David Butler. I'm a staff attorney with
25 the Commission. And, again, on behalf of

Commission Staff, we want to thank everyone for coming out on this rainy night to express your opinions in this rate case. This proceeding before the Commission is under Docket No. 2019-290-WS and concerns, as you know, a proposed increase in rates and charges, filed with the Commission by Blue Granite Water Company.

We do have a few more things to say about the procedure tonight. I think Mr. Knowles did a good job, but I have some additional instructions for you this evening.

While we may not be in a courtroom or hearing room tonight, it is important to remember that this public hearing is as if we were in a hearing room or courtroom, and the Commission is mandated by law to follow certain practices.

Only those persons who have signed up to speak will be able to speak. Mr. Rob Bockman, who is with us over in the corner, will be calling your names and notify the Commission that you wish to testify. The Commission won't be able to hear from you unless you've gone ahead and signed up to testify.

And a few more words about the actual process that we'll use once Mr. Bockman calls you: You

1 will be sworn in, telling everyone that what you're
2 saying is the truth as known to you. After your
3 name is called as a speaker, we'll ask you to come
4 up to the podium in the center of the room. Come
5 on up, when your name is called. We'll swear you
6 in. Please give your name and the name of your
7 street where you live and/or the subdivision you
8 live in and your town. You do not have to give
9 your house number, per se, if you don't want to,
10 but just let us know what street or subdivision you
11 are in. The transcript of this hearing will
12 actually be published and placed in the record, as
13 required by law, so that anybody can read it. If
14 you will, please confirm that you are a customer of
15 Blue Granite Water Company for water, sewer, or
16 both water and sewer. Go ahead and proceed after
17 that point with whatever you want to tell the
18 Commission for your testimony.

19 Now it's very important that you speak into
20 the microphone on the podium so that everyone can
21 hear you, including our court reporter. We have a
22 fully certified court reporter with us tonight, who
23 will be transcribing you word-for-word, and she
24 will be creating a record for the Commission to
25 study after the hearing is over. And after you're

1 done, as Mr. Knowles said, please do remain at the
2 podium for any clarifying questions that either the
3 parties or the Commissioners may have for you.

4 Everyone who has signed up to speak will be
5 given the same three-minute time limit. As you can
6 see, we do have a timer over here, which will aid
7 in timing your testimony. There will be a buzzer
8 to indicate the end of your three minutes.

9 Another point I will make is, often, in these
10 hearings, people tell us, "Well, the guy that just
11 spoke just said what I was going to say. You know,
12 what do I do?" Well, you have two choices. If you
13 think they expressed it pretty well, you can stand
14 up and say so, that you really, you know, changed
15 your mind and you don't want to speak. Or, if you
16 prefer, you can go ahead and speak as you had
17 planned to. But that's your choice. You can
18 either decline to speak or go ahead and speak.

19 I will mention the Sheriff tells us that there
20 are a number of people in the overflow room on the
21 second floor who also want to be heard tonight, and
22 he asked that, if you don't mind, when you finish
23 speaking and have answered all the questions from
24 the parties and the Commissioners, if you wouldn't
25 mind maybe, if you want to proceed to the overflow

1 room and make room for some more people who
2 actually want to be heard tonight. We've got an
3 overflow crowd and have had to send some people up
4 there. So if you'll go up and trade places with
5 some people that want to be heard, we would
6 appreciate that very much.

7 Another thing I would ask you, if you happen
8 to have a cell phone with you – and most people do
9 nowadays – if you don't mind, how about muting that
10 thing or cutting it off, one of the two. Sometimes
11 those things will go off in the middle of a hearing
12 and Ms. Wheat can't hear what the person is saying
13 at the podium for the cell phone, so, if you
14 haven't already done it, if you don't mind, please,
15 do mute those things or cut them off.

16 And the only other thing I might say, Mr.
17 Knowles did mention a minute ago that the
18 Commission can't really answer questions, and I
19 wanted to spend a minute telling you why not.
20 Basically, the General Assembly has passed a law
21 that says that this Commission happens to make up a
22 panel of judges. They are judges in this rate
23 case. And if you're over in York County Courthouse
24 and you're a witness or whatever, you can't ask the
25 judge a question, okay? They're going to ask you

1 questions, but you can't ask the judge a question.
2 Well, the General Assembly has now said that our
3 Commission is the same way, and you can't ask a
4 question about the cases before them. Now, as Mr.
5 Knowles said, there are plenty of other people
6 around here that can answer questions for you: any
7 of the staff members from the Office of Regulatory
8 Staff or you might ask someone from the company.
9 You can ask them all the questions you want. But
10 please don't be offended if the Commission doesn't
11 respond to a question you may have, because the
12 General Assembly has just said, "Don't do it," and
13 the Commission is very strict in following that
14 rule.

15 So, we do appreciate your attendance tonight.
16 Appreciate it very much. And we look forward to
17 hearing what you have to say.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe that's all
19 I have.

20 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Butler.

21 I wanted to make sure that everyone knows that
22 we have in attendance tonight Representative Raye
23 Felder, Representative Bruce Bryant, from here –
24 there they are [indicating]. And we're going to
25 hear, in a moment, from Senator Climer.

1 I wanted to – I was kind of making light of
2 the applause thing, but the applause, if you really
3 do hold your applause, it helps our court reporter
4 hear what's going on and it helps – and it doesn't
5 take away from your friends' times who are up here
6 speaking.

7 So, Senator Wes Climer, if you could come
8 forward, we're going to open it up with you, and
9 then we'll begin the testimony from – and we've got
10 Allison Love, from County Counsel, but Allison is
11 here and she's going to speak later.

12 **SEN. WES CLIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is
13 this audio adequate quality? Okay.

14 Well, first of all, I want to thank y'all for
15 coming from across the State to be here to hear
16 from the people in York County. As you can tell
17 from the size of the crowd here and the fact that
18 we are flowing into an overflow room, this is an
19 issue of extreme import to the people in York
20 County.

21 And so I also want to take a moment to thank
22 all of you [indicating] for being here tonight,
23 because this is our opportunity as a community to
24 be heard on this matter before the Public Service
25 Commission. And to that end, I also want to thank

1 Councilwoman Love, who has done an extraordinary
2 job organizing so many people to be here.

3 Members of the Commission, I'll tell you my
4 gratitude will only increase to the extent that you
5 take the time to listen, and not only listen but
6 act on what you hear tonight. Not a week goes by
7 that I do not get several e-mails, phone calls,
8 texts, et cetera, from many of the people who are
9 here, describing the problems they have with Blue
10 Granite Water Company, whether that is dirty water,
11 whether that is exorbitant rates that they can't
12 afford, whether that is a water service being
13 disconnected.

14 And so I want to raise three points regarding
15 the pending – or, regarding the docket, the first
16 of which is, when you have a company that has the
17 record that Blue Granite has, we cannot possibly
18 trust them with the annual rate adjustment
19 mechanism that they have proposed. That submits
20 these people's financial welfare to the whim of a
21 company whose accounting system has demonstrated no
22 evidence whatsoever that we should have any trust
23 in. Second, it creates an enormous disincentive
24 for the company to maintain its infrastructure
25 adequately. And, third, it would deprive this

1 community and others served by Blue Granite Water
2 Company across the State of future opportunities to
3 weigh in in formal proceeding such as this.

4 Second, the company's proposed return on
5 equity is completely divorced from reality. We've
6 seen a trend from across the country and across the
7 Southeast that commissions such as yours are
8 lowering the returns on equity. That is the profit
9 that the company makes. And concurrent to that, we
10 are in a historically low-interest-rate
11 environment, which in turn should translate into
12 lower utility costs for these ratepayers.

13 Lastly, I want to say: It is unconscionable,
14 unconscionable that this company, with the track
15 record it has, would come to York County and ask
16 for a 55 percent rate increase. A 55 percent rate
17 increase on people living on fixed incomes, people
18 who were already paying eternally escalating costs
19 for a product of low and declining quality.

20 And so, members of the Commission, I want to
21 reiterate to you that I'm grateful you came here
22 tonight. I hope you listen. And most importantly,
23 I hope you act on what you'll hear from these
24 people from York County tonight, these stories that
25 I hear week after week after week, as you

1 contemplate your final ruling in the days and weeks
2 ahead. Thank you.

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Senator Climer.
4 Okay. Mr. Bockman.

5 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 Yes, I am Rob Bockman with the Public Service
7 Commission, Director of Public Information.

8 I'll be reading out your names. I do ask
9 that, when you take your stance at the podium, that
10 you lean into the microphone, please, and speak
11 clearly, so that everyone in the room and everyone
12 in the overflow room – especially Ms. Wheat, our
13 court reporter – can hear you.

14 I will call your names in blocks of three.
15 The first person on that list will take the podium.
16 The two people following that person will be seated
17 in these two front chairs right here [indicating].
18 So we ask that you proceed orderly to the podium.
19 Please direct your remarks to the Commission.
20 Please remain standing at the podium until all
21 questions have been directed to you and you have
22 addressed all questions, and then take your seat,
23 at which point I'll call the next name, and that
24 person in this process will continue.

25 Aside from that, I believe we are ready to

1 commence, so I will first call out Ken Love,
2 followed by Rebecca Lowery, and Joseph DePalma.
3 That's Ken Love, Rebecca Lowery, and Joseph
4 DePalma, please.

5 [Witness affirmed]

6 THEREUPON came,

7 K E N N E T H L O V E ,

8 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

9 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name.

10 WITNESS: Kenneth Love. 604 Bethel Street, in
11 Clover.

12 I'm Ken Love. I'm the Assistant
13 Superintendent of Clover School District No. 2 for
14 business services. I want to thank you for coming
15 tonight and appreciate your taking your time to
16 listen to what we may have to say.

17 We have a short statement – [indicating].
18 That better? We have a short statement to share
19 with you. In the last 12 months, our school
20 district has spent \$161,590.20 for water and sewer
21 services with Blue Granite Water Company. Any
22 increase or disruption in service commits a real
23 problem for us, because we have three schools in
24 excess of 2500 students and faculty, serving in the
25 area by Blue Granite Water Company.

1 The proposed increase of 55 percent is more
2 than an average teacher's salary in our school
3 district. We understand that there are costs
4 associated with providing any service, and we
5 certainly need an adequate supply of reliable
6 freshwater. It's essential for our operations – if
7 you can imagine what happens when we have to shut
8 down three schools with over 2500 students and
9 provide appropriate water and sewer services for
10 them. However, rate increases not coupled with
11 improved services significantly hinders our ability
12 to provide proper instructional programs. We can't
13 run without water and sewer. We have to have
14 appropriate pressure in order for our toilets to
15 work properly.

16 Increases could also cause our resources to be
17 shifted from instructional needs to utilities, if
18 you think about those dollars. Adequate
19 communication is also essential, because
20 interruptions in service cause us to interrupt our
21 instructional program. This was severely lacking
22 in the most recent case that we had a water line
23 break. We have experienced challenges in this
24 area, because we need to be on time every day, and
25 a regular basis. And we need to have quality

1 service on time, and a regular basis.

2 We thank you again for coming. We appreciate
3 your sharing your time and we appreciate your
4 listening to our comments and making the
5 appropriate calculations. We are expecting an
6 increase of service and reliability as we move on
7 with these improvements.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Love.

9 **WITNESS:** Thank you, sir.

10 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Questions from the parties?
11 Questions?

12 [No response]

13 Commissioners? Commissioner Ervin.

14 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 **EXAMINATION**

16 **BY COMMISSIONER ERVIN:**

17 **Q** Mr. Love, is there just one school district in York
18 County or more than one?

19 **A** There are four school districts in York County. Clover
20 is the only one served directly by Blue Granite.

21 **Q** And so, have you had any problems in the Clover area
22 with the service that the company has provided you for
23 water and sewer?

24 **A** We have had some breaks both in the Lake Wylie area
25 served by Blue Granite, as well as the Clover area

1 served by the Town of Clover.

2 **Q** And when did those breaks occur, if you can recall,
3 approximately?

4 **A** The Blue Granite was roughly six weeks or so ago.
5 Clover's was just last week.

6 **Q** How were they handled? Who called the company and how
7 did they respond?

8 **A** The Town of Clover called us when this happened last
9 week. We just finished that – the final test came back
10 this week. We learned from Blue Granite when the
11 pressure went down, and then after we made some calls on
12 our behalf, then the Blue Granite representative started
13 calling us, letting us know when the water was expected
14 to be completed.

15 **Q** How long did it take to restore service?

16 **A** About three days.

17 **Q** Three days?

18 **A** Yes, sir.

19 **Q** And so –

20 **A** We missed a full day and a half of school.

21 **Q** You had to cancel school?

22 **A** We had to cancel school.

23 **Q** Were you under a boil-water advisory after that, for a
24 time?

25 **A** Yes, sir. We provided several pallet loads of bottled

1 water for our students.

2 **Q** What about lunch in the cafeteria?

3 **A** We provided some cafeteria food by bags, and we brought
4 some food in from other schools in the district.

5 **Q** Was the entire community affected, as well?

6 **A** The entire Lake Wylie area was, yes. We perhaps were a
7 little cautious, in terms of the boiled water, because
8 we have so many students, we have so many students that
9 do have health problems. So we would provide the
10 bottled water for them, even if we weren't advised to do
11 so.

12 **Q** Three days of lost service, it sounds to me like an
13 inexcusable delay. What happened?

14 **A** It was a major break on Highway 274 that took a while to
15 get repaired.

16 **Q** When was the other break you referred to?

17 **A** The other break was on Highway 321. That was bringing
18 the supply of water from Gastonia to the Town of Clover.

19 **Q** How long did it last?

20 **A** It was three days, as well. We just finished that this
21 week.

22 **Q** And you missed school, as well, for that one?

23 **A** We – we did not have to close the school for that. We
24 had enough notice and were prepared to make it through
25 there.

1 **Q** We appreciate you coming tonight, and thank you for your
2 testimony.

3 **A** Thank you, sir.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Belser.

5 **EXAMINATION**

6 **BY INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:**

7 **Q** Thank you, Mr. Love. Appreciate you being here tonight.
8 Can you – do you know if the break that occurred, that
9 affected the school six weeks ago, was that on Blue
10 Granite's lines or was that on somebody else's lines?

11 **A** That was on Blue Granite's lines.

12 **Q** Okay. And how about the one that affected Clover?

13 **Q** That was on Clover's line. See, the Lake Wylie – Clover
14 school district is 21 miles long, seven miles deep –
15 seven miles wide. The Town of Clover provides water
16 service for the schools on the western side of the
17 county, and it gets its water supply from the Town of
18 Gastonia, pipes it down. On the eastern side of the
19 county, the eastern side of our school district, Blue
20 Granite provides it and it encompasses the area that we
21 refer to as Lake Wylie.

22 **Q** Yes, sir.

23 **A** It gets its water from the county, which gets its water
24 from the Town of Rock Hill that is piped up Highway 274.

25 **Q** All right, sir. Thank you. I appreciate that

1 explanation. Now, you mentioned in your statement
2 wanting adequate communication. Tell me what you mean.
3 Can you explain what you're looking for, and what was
4 done and how it needs to be improved?

5 **A** We would appreciate it if the Blue Granite folks would
6 let us know if they anticipate a disruption in service
7 or a change of quality or something like that, that
8 they're aware of. And on the morning of that particular
9 break, if they had let us know earlier, we still
10 probably would've ended up with the same case of closing
11 school because of the water supply, but it was a day and
12 a half, or so, before we learned about it from them. We
13 learned about it because pressure went down, and the
14 fire department let us know that we had a challenge.

15 On the other side, the Town of Clover called us
16 that afternoon at 4 o'clock or so, as soon as they
17 noticed the break, and we were able to prepare for the
18 next day.

19 **Q** Thank you, very much. Appreciate your testimony.

20 **A** Yes, ma'am.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

22 Commissioners, any other questions?

23 Commissioner Howard.

24 <

25 <

EXAMINATION**BY COMMISSIONER HOWARD:**

Q Mr. Love, thank you for your testimony. Y'all have sewer service also with Blue Granite, or is the sewer service from a different provider?

A Sewer service comes through Blue Granite, as well, yes, sir.

Q Have you had any problems with your sewer service?

A We have not experienced any problems with the sewer service.

COMMISSIONER HOWARD: Thank you very much, again. Thank you for coming.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.
Commissioner Whitfield.

COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD: Thank you, Mr.
Chairman.

EXAMINATION**BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:**

Q Mr. Love, at one time we regulated Tega Cay, which we don't anymore, but back to that Lake Wylie area and what Commissioner Belser was asking you about, other than the break with Highway 274, how many other instances have you had this interruption? I'm not referring to Clover, but to the Blue Granite Lake Wylie area. How many other interruptions in service have y'all experienced in the

1 school district, other than the one major one you're
2 talking about?

3 **A** This is the only time that I recall we've had to close
4 the school because of lack of water. Just the one a few
5 weeks ago.

6 **Q** And one other question. You quoted a number, and I
7 didn't write it down quick enough. I know our court
8 reporter probably got it, but what was that number you
9 spent?

10 **A** A hundred and sixty-one thousand five hundred ninety
11 dollars and twenty cents [\$161,590.20] in the last 12
12 months.

13 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Thank you, sir.

14 That's all I have, Mr. Chairman.

15 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

16 Mr. Love, thank you for being here tonight.

17 Appreciate your testimony.

18 **WITNESS:** Thank you folks for coming.

19 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

20 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

21 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next, we have Rebecca Lowery,
22 followed by Joseph DePalma, followed by Tony Hart.
23 Rebecca Lowery, Joseph DePalma, and Tony Hart, if
24 you would take your place at the front seating,
25 please.

[Witness affirmed]

THEREUPON came,

R E B E C C A L O W E R Y ,

who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name for the record.

WITNESS: Hi. I'm Rebecca Lowery, and I live at Harpers Green townhomes. It's a Clover address, but it's actually part of Lake Wylie, you know, it's just not incorporated, as you know.

I just want to let the people with the water company know that I'm a single lady. I lost my husband at a fairly young age and I've been by myself a long time. And I lived in North Carolina for years, and I moved to South Carolina five years ago. I had no idea that water was this expensive, you know. I probably would not be here if I had known that, you know.

I've seen – in the last five years, I've seen a steady increase, you know, in my bills every month. I live by myself and I have – you know, my water bill is between \$85 and \$90, and February was \$104. And that's a lot of money, you know. It's just almost impossible on a fixed income, you know. I'm on Social Security. I lost my husband fairly

1 young and so, you know, there wasn't a lot of
2 insurance, a lot of this or a lot of that, and
3 there are a lot of other women in our neighborhood
4 who are, you know, widows and are by themselves,
5 also. It's just – I know that you have to pay for
6 service, and I don't – you know, I want to do that,
7 but I want the company to be fair. I don't think
8 that 55 percent or even a 30 percent increase at
9 one time is something that they can expect, you
10 know, a person that's living on fixed income to
11 handle.

12 And I just wish that they would take this into
13 consideration, you know. There's got to be some
14 other way – there's just got to be some way that
15 this can be a raise, an increase – if it is done,
16 you know, that it will not be that much, you know.
17 I just – I'm even thinking, you know, will I have
18 to sell my townhome and move somewhere where, you
19 know, water's not so expensive? Will I have to go
20 back to North Carolina? What am I going to have to
21 do? You know, basically, that's where I am right
22 now. And it's a daily worry; every month, I'm
23 holding my breath for the water bill when it comes.
24 When I see that big water bill, I'm like, "Oh, my
25 gosh." So, I appreciate your time.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Lowery.
2 Appreciate it.

3 Any questions from the company?

4 [No response]

5 Other parties, questions?

6 [No response]

7 Commissioners?

8 [No response]

9 Thank you so much for being here.

10 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

11 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

12 **MR. BOCKMAN:** We have Joseph DePalma, followed
13 by Tony Hart, and Charles Battaglia. Joseph
14 DePalma, Tony Hart, and Charles Battaglia.

15 [Witness affirmed]

16 THEREUPON came,

17 **J O S E P H D e P A L M A ,**
18 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

19 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
20 the record.

21 **WITNESS:** My name is Joseph DePalma. I live
22 on Whispering Pines Drive, in River Hills. That's
23 near the bridge.

24 I'm here because I object to the proposed rate
25 increase for a number of reasons, which I'll lay

1 out for you.

2 First of all, Blue Granite does not invest in
3 infrastructure in our growing area. The only way a
4 new neighborhood in our area gets water or sewage
5 service is if the developer installs the necessary
6 equipment and then deeds it to Blue Granite for
7 free. The only exception I'm aware of was the
8 recent connection that Blue Granite made to the
9 Charlotte water system, and this was done because
10 their grid could not supply sufficient water to the
11 Lake Wylie area.

12 Secondly, they constantly ask for these
13 ridiculously high increases without any real cause
14 being stated, and I think they do that just to hope
15 that you'll say, "Okay, you can't have 50 percent
16 but you can have 10."

17 They have restructured the bills so that
18 almost everything now is on a fixed charge and
19 nothing has to do – or very little has to do with
20 water usage. My monthly bill starts at \$80.19
21 before I take the first drop of water out of the
22 tap. So if I go on vacation for a month, I've
23 still got to pay that \$80. Then the water is added
24 at a rate of \$7.55 per thousand gallons. Just for
25 your information, that is just about the cost of

1 desalinating seawater.

2 Blue Granite does not treat water or sewage.
3 They are simply a middleman. They pay \$4.42 per
4 thousand gallons for the water they buy from York
5 County and it comes from Rock Hill and through York
6 County, and then they charge it at \$7.55, as I
7 mentioned. That's a 71 percent markup. I don't
8 know about you, but I don't know any businesses
9 that can get a 71 percent markup. And I don't know
10 of any – oh, by the way, as I mentioned, the \$7.55
11 would pay for desalinated water, which is
12 considered to be too expensive except in areas like
13 Saudi Arabia or Southern California.

14 We're in a low interest-rate environment, low-
15 inflation environment. So what in the world
16 justifies a 50 percent increase? As an example of
17 a comparison, my son lives in Charlotte. He has a
18 family of five. His water bill – water and sewage
19 bill runs \$60-\$65 a month, and that includes the
20 storm-water charges that he has to pay, that we
21 don't pay in York County.

22 So because of these facts, I urge you to deny
23 Blue Granite any increase, and I call on York
24 County government to take over the water and sewer
25 system for unincorporated York County – either

1 that, or let us deal with the problem directly.

2 [Applause]

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Any questions? Questions
4 from the parties? Yes, ma'am.

5 **MS. DOVER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

7 **BY MS. DOVER:**

8 **Q** Mr. DePalma, how long have you been a customer of Blue
9 Granite?

10 **A** Thirty-two years.

11 **Q** Thirty-two years. And you mentioned that everything now
12 is a fixed bill? Has it not always been that way?

13 **A** No. It used to be – there was a fixed charge for water
14 and then water had a certain rate; and then there was a
15 fixed charge for sewage, and sewage was based on the
16 number of gallons of water you used, so much per
17 thousand gallons.

18 **Q** Okay. And you mentioned a 71 percent markup. Could you
19 explain that a little bit?

20 **A** Yes. Rock Hill treats the water that we all drink.
21 They sell it to York County, and York County sells it to
22 Blue Granite, and then Blue Granite sells it to us. So
23 everybody is taking a slice. The price to Blue Granite
24 is – let me get it right – \$4.42 per thousand gallons,
25 and the price on my bill is \$7.55 per thousand gallons.

1 That's a 71 percent markup.

2 **Q** All right. Thank you, Mr. DePalma.

3 **A** Sure.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

5 Any other questions from the parties?

6 [No response]

7 Commissioners?

8 [No response]

9 Thank you very much, Mr. DePalma.

10 **WITNESS:** Thank you

11 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

12 **MR. BOCKMAN:** We have Tony Hart, followed by

13 Charles Battaglia, followed by Judith Basie.

14 [Witness affirmed]

15 THEREUPON came,

16 **T O N Y H A R T ,**

17 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

18 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
19 the record.

20 **WITNESS:** My name is Tony Hart. I am a
21 resident and property owner on Battery Circle in
22 the Harpers Green subdivision of Lake Wylie. I've
23 been a resident there for 10 years, since it was
24 first opened.

25 I guess I'm here for the same reason everybody

1 else is, in that I'm concerned about what we're
2 paying and what we're going to pay, and why we're
3 having to pay this. I don't know if we understand
4 how we're being charged – which Mr. DePalma brought
5 up very clearly.

6 Now, what I don't know is who to be angry and
7 frustrated with. Should I be angry with the water
8 company for what they are doing to me? Or should I
9 be angry with all the bureaucrats and the
10 politicians who have allowed this to happen over
11 the past 10 years? We've got to correct that. I
12 don't know how to correct it, but it has to be
13 corrected.

14 Now, that's my major frustration, besides the
15 cost. We are accustomed to a pay-for-service
16 economy. You get a Duke Power bill, they tell you
17 how many kilowatts you used and they charge you.
18 You get a Piedmont Gas bill, they tell you how many
19 cubic feet you used, and they charge you. We get a
20 bill from Blue Granite and there's an extortion tax
21 on there. It says I'm going to pay, right now,
22 \$65, every month, which will go up to \$101 with the
23 increase. This is taken off of my bill. Didn't
24 make up the figures. Everything I gave you comes
25 off my bills.

1 How in the world do they justify charging me
2 \$100 at their discretion? Not because I used it.
3 How does the guy next door, who has 14 teenagers,
4 wife does 10 loads of laundry a week – I'm a senior
5 citizen with a wife – their bill is the same as
6 mine. That's not fair. None of this is fair.
7 That's the question. The billing is not fair.

8 I have property in other states, seniors
9 living there; they're relatives. I'm paying
10 \$25-\$30 a month for water. I can't do that here.
11 I can't afford to pay the bill. Why should they
12 get 51 percent and the government, who pays my
13 Social Security, says I get 1.6 percent? That's
14 kind of unfair. I'm supposed to take this 1.6
15 percent and justify it to pay their bill. I can't
16 do it. It's not fair.

17 All I'm asking is –

18 [3-minute signal]

19 – fairness and for you people to give us
20 fairness. Thank you. I appreciate it.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Hart.

22 Questions from the parties?

23 [No response]

24 Commissioners? Commissioner Belser.

25 <

EXAMINATION**BY INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:**

Q Mr. Hart – over here [indicating] – thank you for your testimony tonight.

A You're more than welcome. Thank you.

Q Are you receiving water and sewer service?

A Yes, I am.

Q Okay.

A My sewer service will go from – I have the bill here – it's now \$65 every month; their proposed increase will bring it up to \$101.30 a month, for sewage.

Q Right.

A If I'm gone for the month, like Mr. DePalma, I'm in the same boat. I'm paying for a service I don't get and don't need. I don't mind paying for usage; I don't mind paying a reasonable fee. But \$100 a month to be extorted, and I have no choice; I have to use the water. You won't let me drill a well. You won't let me go anywhere else. You won't take over the water system. I'm stuck. Everyone in this room is stuck. We're paying over 50 percent more and we can't justify what we've paid in the past. I didn't mean to ramble on you.

Q That's all right. I just – you had testified about the sewer rate, and I just wanted to confirm that you are receiving water and sewer, and you've answered that.

1 **A** Yes.

2 **Q** And I appreciate. Thank you, Mr. –

3 **A** Okay.

4 **Q** – Hart.

5 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Other Commissioners?

6 [No response]

7 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Hart.

8 **WITNESS:** You're welcome.

9 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

10 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Charles Battaglia,
11 followed by Judith Basie, followed by L. Michelle
12 Transou.

13 [Witness affirmed]

14 THEREUPON came,

15 **C H A R L E S B A T T A G L I A ,**

16 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

17 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
18 the record.

19 **WITNESS:** Charles Battaglia. I live in
20 Foxwood subdivision, on Brookside Drive.

21 Thank you, gentlemen. Mine will be very
22 short, since everybody else has had such great
23 oratorical words. That's the same thing that's
24 happening to me, also, is that my price is going to
25 go up also, like everybody else. In fact, I looked

1 at my electric bill the other day. I says to my
2 wife, "My electric bill is a lot less than this.
3 This water bill is almost two and a half times
4 greater than my electric bill." I says, "What's
5 this?" I says, "We're using the same amount of
6 water."

7 And the fact that he said before about the
8 drilling a well, even if he did, the water is
9 contaminated that's in the ground in that area;
10 that's why we hooked up.

11 So Blue Granite is hooked up to Rock Hill's
12 water system, even though they don't treat the
13 water, as Mr. Hart said. I looked at their
14 treatment plant a couple of weeks ago. Basically,
15 this is what I found. They all use a pond system
16 there. Basically, there's no aeration type systems
17 there; it's a passive system. In fact, years ago,
18 I used to run a wastewater treatment and a drinking
19 water plant for a small community where I used to
20 work, and I never ran into trouble like this.
21 There are maintenance things that have to be done.
22 I don't see any kind of maintenance or equipment
23 for the pond system, other than being dredged once
24 in a while, which I think hasn't been done in many
25 years. So there's a bunch of things that I can't

1 see the justification for them raising it this
2 high. They raised it up, I think, two months ago –
3 I mean, two years ago, and that was excessive, too.
4 I believe we should not give them anything.

5 That's about all I have to say.

6 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Battaglia.

7 Questions? Mr. Knowlton?

8 **MR. KNOWLTON:** Thank you.

9 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

10 **BY MR. KNOWLTON:**

11 **Q** You Battaglia, you said you've had some experience
12 running a small municipality's sewage plant. Can you
13 tell us what sorts of –

14 **A** Yeah, I actually worked for a company, but I won't say
15 the name of the school because they've gone out of
16 business – it's actually not out of business, but
17 they're still in business. What we used to do is have
18 50 people on that system, and basically we supplied
19 freshwater and wastewater service. All right? Even
20 when we did hook up – finally, we did hook up to
21 Mecklenburg sewer system, only because they ran a pipe
22 through our property and, you know, they asked that,
23 said, can we hook up, so that's the only reason we did
24 that. We still supplied freshwater. But the point here
25 is that we did not do any increase in price to the

1 people for the sewer system or anything like that,
2 because it was in-house, so that –

3 **Q** The –

4 **A** Okay.

5 **Q** The question that I wanted to ask was what kind of
6 maintenance should be done, because you testified –

7 **A** Okay.

8 **Q** – that no maintenance or nothing is being done on the
9 Foxwood catchment pond.

10 **A** On a pond system, basically, it's like several sections.
11 You have a collection area, a great big area maybe about
12 like two or three football-field size areas, with weirs,
13 and where the water has to go through the system. And
14 it's basically a system that doesn't use any pumps or
15 anything like that. It's all passive. It basically –
16 it works aerobic on top and anaerobic on the bottom.
17 Okay? And then this water goes to another spot where
18 the water's clarified, then it's going to be
19 chlorinated – disinfected, I should say – and then it
20 has to be dumped into a creek – in this case, it would
21 be Sugar Creek, which runs back in there.

22 And then, basically, they have to – like I say –
23 they check once in a while. So there's no actual real
24 other maintenance, and once in a while they're supposed
25 to go out and dredge that thing, because eventually it

1 will fill up with sediment and becomes less effective.
2 And if it doesn't turn over, you can actually smell it,
3 which means the stuff on the bottom will turn over,
4 which is now anaerobic, which – okay, when I say aerobic
5 and anaerobic, aerobic is air-breathers, and the ones on
6 the bottom are mostly septic, which has a very bad
7 smell.

8 **Q** Thank you. I think you've answered the gist of my
9 question. Are you aware of any time when our – when the
10 Foxwood pond has been dredged?

11 **A** I have not, but I've heard somebody say 16 years ago
12 they did something, but I can't say if they did a –

13 **Q** Thank you, very much.

14 **A** – very good job, because the way it's situated, where
15 they dump it, it has to be trucked out. They don't even
16 have a place to dry it out and turn it into fertilizer.
17 So that's the thing I'm saying, there. But I think
18 they're working on a timebomb here, because eventually
19 that's going to have to be done and it's going to be
20 very costly.

21 **MR. KNOWLTON:** Thank you very much, sir.

22 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

23 Commissioners, any questions?

24 [No response]

25 Thank you, Mr. Battaglia.

1 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

2 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

3 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Judith Basie,
4 followed by L. Michelle Transou, followed by
5 Dorothy Cunningham.

6 [Witness affirmed]

7 THEREUPON came,

8 **J U D I T H B A S I E ,**

9 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

10 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
11 the record.

12 **WITNESS:** My name is Judith Basie. My husband
13 and I have lived for 17 years in Blue Granite's
14 Service Territory I. We are part of Commissioner
15 Whitfield's Fifth District. And we are in Autumn
16 Cove, in the Lake Wylie/Clover area.

17 A lot of the facts and figures have been
18 presented so far, and they are pertinent. I did
19 some research on this, in preparation for a meeting
20 that couldn't take place two weeks ago. Half a
21 million dollars in moving expenses incurred by Blue
22 Granite, a diamond ring, a 65-inch TV, Chamber of
23 Commerce dues, flower arrangements, donations, and
24 scholarships, all while asking us to continue a
25 non-consumption-based rate structure. That's been

1 mentioned very adequately. As Senator Climer said
2 so well, we're being asked to trust Blue Granite
3 concerning an annual rate adjustment mechanism that
4 we, as consumers, according to the paper, will have
5 no voice.

6 Now, those are facts and figures. What
7 interests me, equally, if not more, are people. I
8 was privileged to teach in Clover School District
9 for quite a number of years – kindergarten most of
10 those years – and during that time I saw children
11 who couldn't come to school because they were ill
12 and couldn't afford the doctor, children whose
13 parents could not adequately clothe or feed them.
14 We did that, and we were happy to do it. This to
15 say, what will these proposed rate increases do to
16 these people, the least of these – and by "least" I
17 mean the youngest?

18 It's very important that we understand how
19 every rate increase, every jump in cost of living
20 affects people and pushes more people into the
21 poverty zone. People want to do for themselves,
22 they want to be responsible, they want to pay their
23 bills. But rate increases such as this proposed
24 one make it difficult, if not impossible, to do so
25 responsibly in the ways they would like.

1 So, I ask in the name of humaneness, in the
2 name of concern for other people and their needs,
3 that this rate increase not go through. Thank you.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Basie.

5 Any questions?

6 [No response]

7 Questions from the parties?

8 [No response]

9 Commissioners?

10 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Mr. Chairman, I have –

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Ervin.

12 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** – a question.

13 **EXAMINATION**

14 **BY COMMISSIONER ERVIN:**

15 **Q** Ms. Basie, what percentage of the schoolchildren in this
16 area do you think live below the poverty line?

17 **A** When I left the school in which I taught, which was
18 Bethany Elementary, I believe it was at about 49 percent
19 free or reduced lunch.

20 **Q** On school –

21 **A** Mr. Love –

22 **Q** – staff?

23 **A** – could speak to that.

24 **Q** On staff?

25 **A** Yes, sir. Yes, sir. And this is what I saw for 25

1 years.

2 **Q** Thank you for coming tonight.

3 **A** Thank you, sir.

4 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Mr. Chairman.

5 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Whitfield.

6 **EXAMINATION**

7 **BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:**

8 **Q** Ms. Basie.

9 **A** Yes, sir.

10 **Q** If I could –

11 **A** Certainly.

12 **Q** – I just want to ask you one thing. It's been stated up
13 here we can't answer questions because we're a judicial
14 body, but have you had the opportunity to view
15 livestreaming or online any of the proceedings we've had
16 the last week? This is the only night hearing I think
17 that has fallen after the merits hearing. I was just
18 curious, have you been able to view any of that or see
19 any of that online?

20 **A** Yes, sir, I did see one online when I was looking for
21 some facts and figures a couple of weeks ago. And
22 that's the only one I've had opportunity to see.

23 **Q** Well, I would – at this time, since we can't answer any,
24 I would refer you to the South Carolina Office of
25 Regulatory Staff, who is here tonight; the South

1 Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs also has an
2 attorney here tonight. And of course we are housed
3 separately from them and can't have any communication
4 with them, but I would urge you, as a citizen and
5 ratepayer, to talk with them and they can probably
6 answer some of your questions. And thank you for your
7 testimony and thank you for coming out.

8 **A** Thank you, sir. I have done that on a number of
9 occasions. They know me.

10 [Laughter]

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

12 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

13 **MR. BOCKMAN:** L. Michelle Transou, followed by
14 Dorothy Cunningham, followed by Randy Lucas. Randy
15 Lucas, please.

16 [Witness affirmed]

17 THEREUPON came,

18 **L . M I C H E L L E T R A N S O U ,**
19 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

20 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
21 the record.

22 **WITNESS:** Thank you. I'm Michelle Transou, 55
23 Honeysuckle Woods, River Hills, Lake Wylie. Thank
24 you for having me this evening and having the
25 opportunity to speak to Council and all the

1 representatives tonight.

2 I have several points I'd like to make. I
3 really want to focus a portion of my discussion
4 around some of the billing issues that I've
5 experienced with Blue Granite. I've been a paying
6 customer, my family and I, for 14 years. And my
7 extended family, my parents, have been customers of
8 this organization for over 30 years.

9 Recently there was some type of systematic
10 conversion that occurred with the billing system,
11 and during that process some notifications were
12 going out and, of course, the regular billing
13 cycles were being issued. And during that window,
14 we were, of course, paying our bills, and we've
15 never been late. Pay our bills on time. We had
16 automated service. And we paid a bill in a
17 particular month and got another cycle of
18 information coming through, where evidently,
19 unbeknownst to us, there was an account number
20 change that occurred without our knowledge. So one
21 afternoon, I was working from home. I walked
22 outside and had a little pink ticket sitting
23 outside my door, and my water had been cut off. No
24 forewarning, no information, nothing. I called my
25 husband. My husband said we paid that bill on

1 time. He went and looked at our records; we could
2 see the deposited check. And this information,
3 this money, was in Blue Granite's coffers, but our
4 water was turned off that very day.

5 So we got in touch with them, and they were
6 responsive that day, of course, because we were not
7 going to be satisfied otherwise, to have that water
8 turned back on, because, again, we had paid our
9 bills and this was not any error of our own. So,
10 succinctly, that was done that evening, due to my
11 husband's coercive discussion with the
12 representative, and we did get our water turned
13 back on that day.

14 My problem with that is that I, too, work in
15 an area of increased regulatory scrutiny, and when
16 something like this is going on and there's a
17 conversion of that magnitude, you have to do your
18 due diligence to ensure that checks and balances
19 are in that system to avoid those types of
20 mistakes. I was not the only person that got
21 impacted in this way. We have several community
22 forums; other people have voiced that they had a
23 similar thing happen. So, this is just absolutely
24 ridiculous that your water would be cut off but
25 your payment would have been taken and accepted.

1 So I really want to urge the Council and
2 Commissioners to, you know, look at this very
3 closely and strategically. We need a better plan
4 for what's going on if, in these instances, we
5 can't even count on the bills being correct or any
6 type of double-check occurring before that type of
7 severity of action is taken. It's just ridiculous.

8 In addition to that, we've had poor water
9 quality over time, and I urge you to decline.

10 [3-minute signal]

11 Thank you for your time.

12 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Transou.
13 Questions.

14 **MR. WELLBORN:** Yes, Mr. Chairman.

15 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

16 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

17 **Q** Ms. Transou, may I ask about when the billing issue
18 happened?

19 **A** The system conversion occurred –

20 **VOICE:** Couple months ago.

21 **WITNESS:** – about six months ago, maybe? Last
22 year, 2019. I don't have an exact date.

23 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

24 **Q** And was the company able to resolve the issue,
25 ultimately? You talked about the steps that you'd taken

1 to contact the company, but –

2 **A** [Nodding head.]

3 **Q** Okay, good. I just wanted to make sure. If there's
4 anything outstanding or that the company needs to
5 address, as I mentioned before, there are folks waiting
6 outside to speak with you. You also mentioned a water
7 quality issue. How long ago was that?

8 **A** It's just been an ongoing – the boil advisories are a
9 regular occurrence. Sometimes you get them, sometimes
10 you don't. If you have elderly or infants in your home,
11 we are – we do not have good water quality and, you
12 know, we – it's a known fact.

13 **Q** Do you find that it's correlated with the water main
14 issues that were discussed earlier tonight?

15 **A** I have no knowledge to think that's the case.

16 **Q** And last question: Are you – do you have My Utility
17 Connect app? I understand that, through that app, you
18 can get alerts such as boil-water advisories and that
19 kind of thing.

20 **A** Not at this time, but I can –

21 **Q** Okay.

22 **A** – look into it.

23 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you.

24 No further questions, Mr. Chairman.

25 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

Any other questions? Mr. Knowles.

MR. KNOWLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Transou, if we could speak with you, Mr. Thompson, Ryder Thompson, is in the back, if we could have just a moment of your time to talk to you about the billing and notice issue, that would be much appreciated.

WITNESS: Certainly.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

Other questions? Mr. Kendree.

MR. KENDREE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CROSS EXAMINATION

BY MR. KENDREE:

Q Could you kindly characterize the frequency of the boil-water advisories?

A Oh. Often.

[Laughter]

It's a regular occurrence. Those kinds of communications go out; we have community newsletters at River Hills. We get notices there. We certainly – through the grapevine, NextDoor.com, et cetera, et cetera, it's a fairly regular occurrence. And, again, there are some phone calls that are provided by the company, but those are hit or miss; you can hear of one but never have actually received a phone call.

1 Q Thank you. And are they limited to this past year, or
2 multiple years?

3 A No, multiple years, in my experience. Thank you.

4 MR. KENDREE: Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

6 Commissioner Belser.

7 EXAMINATION

8 BY INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:

9 Q Thank you, Ms. Transou, for your testimony tonight. I
10 wanted to ask about the phone calls. Do you not get any
11 kind of telephonic message from the company on the
12 boiled water?

13 A Of the boiled water?

14 Q Boil-water alerts?

15 A They're intermittent. They're not reliable.

16 Q Okay. Thank you, very much.

17 A Uh-huh.

18 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

19 Commissioners, any other questions?

20 Commissioner Ervin.

21 EXAMINATION

22 BY COMMISSIONER ERVIN:

23 Q Do you think you're the only one affected by this
24 accounting-shift mistake, or were there others affected
25 by it?

1 **A** Certainly, there are a majority affected, yes, sir.
2 Peers, colleagues, community members.

3 **Q** Did you happen to save the slip they put on your door?

4 **A** Huh-uh. I might still have that. That'd be kind of a –
5 you know, a little bit of a token.

6 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Appreciate you coming
7 tonight. Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

9 Commissioners, any other questions?

10 [No response]

11 Thank you, Ms. Transou.

12 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

13 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Dorothy Cunningham.
14 Dorothy Cunningham, followed by Randy Lucas and
15 Steve Salata. Randy Lucas and Steve Salata to the
16 front, please.

17 [Witness affirmed]

18 THEREUPON came,

19 **D O R O T H Y C U N N I N G H A M ,**

20 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

21 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
22 the record.

23 **WITNESS:** My name is Dorothy Cunningham, and I
24 live in the Foxwood Drive, in – and I live in the
25 Fox Run Drive, and I live in the Fort – or, in the

1 Foxwood subdivision, and I've been there for 40
2 years with my husband.

3 And I was really shocked and really thought
4 the 55 percent in the increase was a typo. But I
5 tried to get onto the online and found out, to my
6 dismay, that it was not.

7 My husband and I, as I said, have been in the
8 Foxwood subdivision for 40 years. And in that
9 time, we have seen several different companies that
10 have bought our utilities, and it seems like
11 everyone promises new infrastructure, a new and
12 improved way of getting better water and more
13 efficiency, and we're still waiting 40 years later.

14 We really feel that it is very expensive, and
15 looking at the bill, as stated, it is moving
16 towards a fixed structure. In January, we were
17 gone for over 10 days, and there was very little
18 impact in our water bill at all. So, again, it's
19 not usage. And what can we do as retired people,
20 and there are several retired people, single
21 people, that you've heard from today, that this
22 increase is going to be a significant change and a
23 significant detriment to us and to our quality of
24 life.

25 I think I wouldn't mind an increase if I had

1 some faith that maybe something would change, and
2 that maybe there would be a new infrastructure.
3 Last summer, we experienced an outage on one of our
4 drives, our main drive, Pelham, and we were not
5 notified. But I was walking with my 94-year-old
6 neighbor and said, "What's going on?" And what I
7 heard was, "Oh, yeah, we've got a water leak.
8 We're trying to find it, and we've got to patch
9 it." Well, when you look at your water bill, you'd
10 wish it wouldn't be a patch.

11 I want to thank you for your consideration,
12 but please consider the people of not only Foxwood
13 but the people of South Carolina. It is ridiculous
14 to hear of a 55 percent increase. I really did
15 pray it was a typo. Thank you.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Cunningham.

17 Any questions? Hang on, Ms. Cunningham. Any
18 questions?

19 [No response]

20 Commissioners, any questions?

21 [No response]

22 Thank you, ma'am. I made you run back just
23 for that.

24 [Laughter]

25 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

1 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Up next we have Randy Lucas.
2 Randy Lucas, followed by Steve Salata and Gregg
3 Adams. Gregg Adams to the front, please.

4 [Witness affirmed]

5 THEREUPON came,

6 **R A N D Y L U C A S ,**
7 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

8 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
9 the record.

10 **WITNESS:** Good evening. I'm Randy Lucas. I
11 live in the Foxwood town, off of Redcoat.

12 Unlike the majority of the people you've been
13 speaking to, this is my first year here. My wife
14 and I are originally from a different state. I
15 don't have all the stats, all the information
16 everybody else has, but going from purchasing a new
17 home, anywhere, currently, you're going to have
18 different type of costs. Put yourself in my shoes
19 and just think about this for a second. I'm a 34-
20 year-old guy with a pregnant wife and a three-year-
21 old. I make \$41,000 a year. Just make it. That's
22 counting gross. And now I have to increase the
23 amount of money that I have to spend on a water
24 bill.

25 I did plumbing and HVAC up north in

1 Pennsylvania. I know a lot about water, a lot
2 about plumbing, a lot about costs. I've been
3 paying for things for – since I was 16, so almost
4 20 years, for myself and my family.

5 What I would say is a 55 percent increase on
6 any kind of bill, no matter, if you put yourself –
7 just think about this, put yourself in my shoes.
8 You have one kid on the way. I don't know anything
9 about a boiling situation – or, boiling alerts that
10 people have mentioned. There's a boiling alert I
11 guess that just happened, recently, and it went on
12 until today. I didn't know about it. Luckily, God
13 has provided me the opportunity to buy some five-
14 gallon jugs of water that I can provide for my
15 three-year-old daughter and my wife, my pregnant
16 wife.

17 Like I said, I don't have all the stats and
18 the information, but I would like you guys to think
19 about this. Put yourself in everybody's
20 situation – place that's in this facility, right?
21 We're not here just because we are frustrated about
22 one thing. We're all here for a reason. And above
23 [indicating] it says, "In God We Trust," so we
24 should all trust that God will provide for things,
25 but you would think Blue Granite would also trust

1 in God that they would take care of – or have the
2 money they need to take care of us.

3 So, that's all I have to say today. I
4 appreciate you.

5 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Lucas.

6 Any questions?

7 [No response]

8 Commissioners?

9 [No response]

10 Thank you, very much.

11 **WITNESS:** Thank you so much.

12 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

13 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Steve Salata?

14 Steve Salata, followed by Gregg Adams and Tim
15 Veeck. Tim Veeck to the front, please.

16 [Witness affirmed]

17 THEREUPON came,

18 **S T E V E S A L A T A ,**

19 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

20 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
21 the record.

22 **WITNESS:** Good evening. My name is Steve
23 Salata. My wife and I reside on Water Oak Drive,
24 in The Coves subdivision, in Lake Wylie. We've
25 been Utilities Inc./Blue Granite customers for nine

1 years now – water customers.

2 I have one comment that I'll raise about a
3 billing process, that we've just encountered.
4 Around the 12th of December of 2019, we received
5 our usual monthly notification by e-mail from Blue
6 Granite that our water bill was posted – in this
7 case, in the amount of \$304.28. Now, given the
8 time of year and we aren't watering our lawn, and
9 the two of us are the only ones living in the
10 house, we were a little shocked by that, but, we
11 pay our bills, so we went on with it. And in this
12 case, we paid by automatic draft to Blue Granite.
13 Well, imagine our surprise and confusion when, on
14 January 9, 2020, we received a letter from Blue
15 Granite saying we were in arrears \$54.28 and, if we
16 did not take action the next 10 days, our service
17 may be severed without further notification.
18 Obviously, we were a little concerned, so my wife
19 called Blue Granite and learned that Blue Granite
20 had placed a cap on our auto-draft of \$250,
21 apparently to avoid the customer being overdrawn,
22 presumably because of the high cost of water bills.
23 The problem is, Blue Granite never advised us this
24 is what they were doing. We only found out after
25 we called.

1 We also learned that Blue Granite had imposed
2 a late fee on the account because we were
3 overdrawn – or –

4 [Laughter]

5 – over our auto-draft, excuse me. Now, after
6 discussing it with the technician, we have an auto-
7 draft cap now \$450 for our water bill. Now,
8 remember, we don't have sewer, just water. That is
9 a shocking but, sadly, not unheard of amount to pay
10 for water from Blue Granite.

11 I am a retired Army colonel. My wife and I
12 and our kids served throughout the world and have
13 lived in a number of places after moving 17 times,
14 and I can tell you, in several instances, we paid
15 for local water, and we have never paid a rate as
16 high as we pay here, anywhere, and we have never
17 encountered a billing situation like we just
18 encountered.

19 We hope you will take that into account when
20 you decide to deny this rate increase, and I thank
21 you very much for the opportunity to share this
22 information with all of you.

23 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you. Thank you for
24 being here.

25 Questions?

1 MR. WELLBORN: Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman.

2 CROSS EXAMINATION

3 BY MR. WELLBORN:

4 Q Mr. Salata, thanks for being here. Did you figure out
5 why that December bill was so high? Was it a leak
6 somewhere or was it a billing issue?

7 A We did have the meter tested. They said the meter was
8 fine. So I don't know why it was so high, to be honest
9 with you.

10 Q But it went back to normal after that?

11 A Our most recent bill was less, yes, sir.

12 Q Did the company refund that overdraft charge?

13 A Yes. We had to call a second time to get it, but we did
14 get it taken care of.

15 Q There aren't any remaining unresolved issues?

16 A Not that I'm aware of.

17 MR. WELLBORN: Thank you.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

20 Any other questions? Mr. Knowles?

21 MR. KNOWLES: Mr. Salata, if you could –
22 wouldn't mind speaking with Mr. Ryder Thompson, of
23 ORS, just briefly about your issue, we'd appreciate
24 that.

25 WITNESS: Sure, no problem.

1 **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you, sir.

2 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Other questions?

3 Commissioners?

4 [No response]

5 Thank you very much, sir, for being here.

6 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

7 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Gregg Adams,
8 followed by Tim Veeck and Sara Tomchin. Tim Veeck
9 and Sara Tomchin to the front, please?

10 [Witness affirmed]

11 THEREUPON came,

12 **G R E G G A D A M S ,**

13 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

14 **MR. RICHARDSON:** State your name for the
15 record.

16 **WITNESS:** My name is Gregg Adams and I'm here
17 representing Habitat for Humanity of York County.
18 I'm the Director of Retail Operations.

19 In April of this past year, we opened a second
20 ReStore location in the Town of Lake Wylie,
21 serviced by Blue Granite Water Company. In
22 comparison to our Rock Hill ReStore, which uses
23 eight times more water than the Lake Wylie ReStore
24 uses, we are paying 288 percent more in water and
25 sewage costs for a ReStore with less customers. On

1 an average month, if we use no water at all in the
2 ReStore, we are paying \$855 a month. With a 55
3 percent rate increase, that would increase to \$1253
4 a month, if we use no water at all in our ReStore.
5 And we're working towards the good of the community
6 to provide affordable housing for people of this
7 county, who are already struggling, and a 55
8 percent increase is just absurd.

9 We appreciate your time and hope that you'll
10 give this matter consideration.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thanks, Mr. Adams.

12 Any questions? Commissioner Ervin.

13 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 **EXAMINATION**

15 **BY COMMISSIONER ERVIN:**

16 **Q** What you say the water bill was?

17 [Laughter]

18 I want to make sure I get this right.

19 **A** If we don't use a drop of water, it's \$855 a month. Our
20 wastewater is over \$700 a month.

21 **Q** That's at Lake Wylie ReStore?

22 **A** It is.

23 **Q** Do you have more than one water meter there?

24 **A** We have one two-inch water meter there. And I called
25 Blue Granite on this, and was told that it is based off

1 the size of the water meter and there was nothing they
2 could do about that.

3 **Q** Did they offer to replace it with a smaller meter?

4 **A** They did not.

5 **Q** Would you like for them to look into that?

6 **A** I would like that.

7 **Q** They're here tonight, so I would suggest –

8 [Laughter]

9 – taking advantage of the fact that they're here,
10 and get that smaller meter installed immediately.

11 **A** Yes, sir.

12 **Q** Thank you for coming.

13 **A** Thank you.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

15 Any other questions, Commissioners? Oh,
16 sorry.

17 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

18 **BY MR. KNOWLTON:**

19 **Q** Sir, do you have any idea how many thousand gallons
20 you're using at that location? Even though it's a two-
21 inch meter, do you have a high usage?

22 **A** It's 1500 gallons.

23 [Laughter]

24 **MR. KNOWLTON:** Your Honor, I rest my case.

25 [Laughter; applause]

1 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

2 MR. BOCKMAN: Tim Veeck, followed by Sara
3 Tomchin and Johnnie Viets? Johnnie Viets to the
4 front, please?

5 [Witness affirmed]

6 THEREUPON came,

7 T I M V E E C K ,

8 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

9 MR. RICHARDSON: State your name for the
10 record.

11 WITNESS: My name is Tim Veeck. I am
12 personally affected by this situation in two ways,
13 so I want to thank you for coming tonight to hear
14 our concerns.

15 I live in the Foxwood neighborhood at 204
16 Pelham Lane. I'm the executive director of Habitat
17 for Humanity of York County. So I'm feeling this
18 personally at my home and also as a result of the
19 organization which I'm trying to lead faithfully.

20 On a personal note, I just want to say that
21 I've lived in the neighborhood for nearly nine
22 years now, and I know for a fact that there's many
23 families in our neighborhood who have had to make
24 personal investments they probably didn't have the
25 money to make, to guarantee the safety and health

1 and consistency of the water quality. Just as an
2 example, I have a water softener, I have a device
3 that removes lead and heavy metals from my water, I
4 have a reverse-osmosis filter, and I have a whole-
5 house water filter. I have a lot of clean water,
6 but it's due to my own funds or the folks who owned
7 the house before me who thankful made some
8 investments, because they had a long history of
9 dealing with the companies in our neighborhood.

10 The other thing that was mentioned about our
11 sewer in Foxwood is the retention pond that sits
12 there. You can smell it in the summer and it has
13 not been serviced in a lengthy period of time, as
14 was already delineated.

15 I would also echo the suspect billing. I've
16 had – over the course of three years, my family was
17 not in our home for a month at a time, three
18 consecutive years, and when we came back the water
19 bill that month was the same or higher than other
20 months when we were in the home. That did not make
21 sense.

22 On the Habitat for Humanity side, I just
23 wanted to delineate again what Greg said. So, our
24 last bill from Bluewater_[sic] Granite was \$848. I
25 just wrote the check yesterday. We've had higher

1 bills than that. The water – the base water charge
2 is \$119 and the wastewater collection charge
3 \$715.88. So that – if I – and, actually, we're
4 being generous in the number that Gregg shared,
5 because that was based upon – I was trying to make
6 math simple; I just did it on a 50 percent
7 increase. So, 55 would actually be a little bit
8 higher, but our bill is going to go to, if we do
9 nothing, \$1253.49 at a 50 percent increase, say
10 there's still an added 5 percent to go onto that.
11 And as Gregg mentioned, right now in Rock Hill,
12 where we have significantly higher water usage, our
13 total bill averages around \$215 for water and
14 sewer. That's a \$1000 difference a month that we
15 pay, after the increase, and I can do a lot with
16 \$1000 and the goodwill of the people here in York
17 County, in terms of helping people have a better
18 place to live in a better quality home.

19 The last thing I want to say, as a nonprofit
20 leader, I have to operate with wisdom and
21 stewardship to guard the public trust that they've
22 put in our organization. And I'm not sure what
23 level of greed and mismanagement comes into play in
24 this decision, and the lack of concern for the
25 public goodwill. Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, Mr. Veeck.

2 Any questions? Mr. Knowles.

3 CROSS EXAMINATION

4 BY MR. KNOWLES:

5 Q Mr. Veeck, could you quantify, roughly, your personal
6 investments in your home to promote water quality?

7 A Yeah. I'll say, again, I was fortunate that – we almost
8 did not move into the neighborhood because of the water
9 situation, but there's a load of really good people in
10 our neighborhood, so that made up for a lot. So, the
11 people before me had already put in the water softener,
12 the whole-house filter, and the reverse-osmosis filter.
13 There's also a filter on our refrigerator, too. So I
14 know the equipment that removes the lead and heavy
15 metals was right between \$1000 and \$1500 for that
16 device, because we did have a scare – I want to say it
17 was maybe two years ago – that there was concern that
18 there was lead in our water in the neighborhood. So
19 several people were buying bottles of water. I think
20 some of my neighbors maybe still are. We did the math
21 and said we might actually come out ahead if we went
22 ahead and bought the unit rather than buy bottled water
23 for who-knows-how-long. So that was the situation. We
24 do have to service all of those pieces of equipment.
25 The water softener, the heavy-metal remover, have to

1 change out the whole-house filter, and have the reverse-
2 osmosis filter serviced every year, so it's in the
3 hundreds of dollars each year that it takes to maintain
4 a sufficient water quality in our home.

5 MR. KNOWLES: Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

7 Yes, sir, Ms. Dover.

8 CROSS EXAMINATION

9 BY MS. DOVER:

10 Q Mr. Veeck, you mentioned a pond that hasn't been
11 serviced in some time, and you said you've lived in your
12 neighborhood for nine years.

13 A Yeah, if I did the math correct. I've been up for a
14 long time, but I woke up – I mean, I moved into the
15 neighborhood July of 2011, so we moved in close to
16 there.

17 Q Okay. Well, since you moved in, do you know if it's
18 been serviced at all?

19 A I do not recall. I've never seen any heavy equipment or
20 any – received a notification that that was going to
21 happen, and as I mentioned, my family and I regularly
22 walk around the neighborhood multiple times a week, and
23 we walk in the area nearby where the pond is. And in
24 summers, you don't have to be particularly close to
25 smell it.

1 MS. DOVER: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

3 Any other questions, Commissioners?

4 Commissioner Howard.

5 EXAMINATION

6 BY COMMISSIONER HOWARD:

7 Q Thank you for your testimony. I was never familiar with
8 Habitat for Humanity, and I'm trying to get my arms
9 around your water usage. How many employees do you
10 have? Is there any reason for you to have what I would
11 call an excessive amount of water usage, compared to an
12 average business?

13 A Well –

14 Q I guess my –

15 A No –

16 Q – thought is Habitat for Humanity is not one that would
17 use a lot of water.

18 A That's a good question. So, we've been speaking about
19 the challenge of there being just a base charge,
20 regardless of usage? So our actual usage at the Lake
21 Wylie store last month was 1550 gallons over a month
22 period. That's not a significant amount of usage. We
23 have maybe a maximum of four employees that may use the
24 restroom a few times a day and turn on the sink briefly.
25 If you look at our Rock Hill store, and this was the

1 bill that we paid in January for our Rock Hill store, we
2 used 11,000 gallons of water, but we paid eight times
3 less, 288 percent less in Rock Hill, than we did for
4 Lake Wylie. And it's consistent. We consistently have
5 significantly less water usage. And I do want to make
6 the point, because Gregg brought it up, we called and
7 specifically asked to be able to reduce the size of our
8 meter and were told that we could not, so – because I
9 was shocked and amazed when I saw the water bill for the
10 first time, moving into the facility, and within the
11 first month we said, "We need to see if we can get that
12 changed," because what used to be there was a grocery
13 store, which admittedly probably had much higher water
14 usage. We have little to no water usage in that
15 facility, and we were told that we could not change out
16 the water meter. That was our first question when we
17 received the first bill.

18 **Q** Well, you can address that question to the company after
19 this.

20 **A** I would love to have them address that and change the
21 water meter.

22 **Q** Well, you have an opportunity. Take advantage of it.

23 **A** Yes.

24 **Q** Thank you.

25 **A** Hopefully next week, they'll do it.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Whitfield.

2 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Thank you, Mr.

3 Chairman.

4 **EXAMINATION**

5 **BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:**

6 **Q** Mr. Veeck, just for the record, again, both Habitat for
7 Humanity and you, as a resident of Foxwood, are both
8 water and sewer customers, both locations?

9 **A** That's correct.

10 **Q** Okay. Before Mr. Knowles, from the South Carolina
11 Office of Regulatory Staff, asked you that question, had
12 you had any conversations or complaints or concerns with
13 South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff?

14 **A** I have not. I have come to previous hearings when – I
15 think the last time – well, I know it was when it was
16 called Utilities, Inc., when they were looking to raise
17 the rates, so – and we've – I've stayed engaged in terms
18 of the conversation, in terms of what's going on in my
19 neighborhood.

20 **Q** I think I do recall you maybe speaking at the night
21 hearing or being there. I would certainly offer that
22 they can help you, both as an individual ratepayer, as a
23 residential customer, and at work, at Habitat for
24 Humanity. So you've got the attorney there, and he's
25 identified several people here in the audience tonight.

1 If you don't get satisfaction from the company, I would
2 certainly encourage you to take advantage of this
3 opportunity and talk to the State representatives about
4 that.

5 **A** Thank you. And if I could offer one more thing, I know
6 this is a rate increase that is going to affect a lot of
7 people here in our county, but other places across the
8 State, which I think are probably even more challenged
9 economically and financially than maybe this area. And
10 so I think the points that were made earlier about the
11 situations that people find themselves in, there's just
12 not a lot of margin for error for a significant portion
13 of our population. And I appreciate the interest that
14 you've taken in asking these questions, because I feel
15 like you are trying to hold the public trust and
16 goodwill, and I hope that you will.

17 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Thank you for your
18 testimony.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Veeck.
21 Okay, appreciate it.

22 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

23 All right. We're going to take – our court
24 reporter has to say every word, so we're going to
25 take about a 10-minute break and then we'll start

1 back again.

2 [WHEREUPON, a recess was taken from 7:20
3 to 7:30 p.m.]

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Ladies and gentlemen, if we
5 could get you to take your seats? If we could get
6 everybody to take your seat? Thank you. I wanted
7 to make sure that everyone, when you speak – and
8 especially if you're getting questions from this
9 side, please remember to stay in front of the
10 microphone so the court reporter picks it all up.
11 She had a little trouble hearing some of you if you
12 were turned that way. Also I want to make sure to
13 recognize Representative Tommy Pope who came in,
14 and we didn't get to recognize him at first, so
15 we're glad to have you here.

16 And, now, Mr. Bockman, we'll continue with the
17 next witness.

18 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Our next three names are Sara
19 Tomchin, Johnnie Viets, and Laura Parks. Johnnie
20 Viets and Laura Parks to the front, please.

21 [Witness affirmed]

22 THEREUPON came,

23 **S A R A T O M C H I N ,**
24 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

25 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

1 **WITNESS:** Sara Tomchin. I live in Cypress
2 Point, in Lake Wylie, and I just moved here last
3 May from Tucson, Arizona. And my water bill here
4 is more than, comparatively, it was in Tucson,
5 Arizona, where they're running out of water. And
6 we're not running out of water.

7 I am retired. I'm on a fixed income, and I
8 speak for those of us who are on a fixed income.
9 We got a 1.6 percent cost-of-living increase this
10 year. Why would the water company deserve anything
11 more than that? It appears that they came for an
12 increase two years ago. Do we expect them to ask
13 for an increase every two years?

14 **VOICE:** Yes.

15 **WITNESS:** They're a private company, and we
16 can't see what their books are, so we can't tell
17 what their return on investment is, or what their
18 costs that they're loading into their P&L. I'm
19 also a retired CPA, and I'd very much like to be
20 able to review their financial statements.

21 [Laughter]

22 So I guess I'm here to say that I think it's
23 very disingenuous of them to come back two years
24 later and ask for 55 percent. I don't think they
25 deserve anything. Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Tomchin.

2 Hang on.

3 Any questions?

4 [No response]

5 Thank you very much for being here, Ms.

6 Tomchin.

7 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

8 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next up, Johnnie Viets, followed
9 by Laura Parks and John Kissinger. John Kissinger
10 to the front, please.

11 [Witness affirmed]

12 THEREUPON came,

13 **J O H N N I E V I E T S ,**

14 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

15 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

16 **WITNESS:** Good evening. My name is Johnny
17 Lynn Viets. I live at – on Thorn Ridge Lane, in
18 The Landing; that's in Lake Wylie.

19 I am retired high-school economics teacher. I
20 live with my husband, who is also retired; he's a
21 retired forester and retired military. We have
22 been in the area 17 years.

23 On January 6, 2020, our water was shut off
24 about 11 a.m. No one rang the doorbell. Our
25 credit rating is above 800, and the bank records

1 showed that the water bill had been paid. I called
2 customer service; after 90 minutes of speaking with
3 at least two different people, I discovered that
4 they had no record of payment. The only way to
5 have the water restored was to call another number
6 and pay \$200.96 via credit/debit card. I gulped,
7 but I did this knowing that I had bank records
8 showing we owed nothing. The water was restored
9 that afternoon about 4 p.m.

10 I called a local Blue Granite representative,
11 who researched the account, and a few days later
12 said I would receive a credit. I wanted a full
13 refund – just one second – and he said he would
14 take care of it. A few weeks later, I received a
15 partial refund and a credit to the account.

16 My concern was, what was Blue Granite doing
17 with my \$200 while I was waiting for a partial
18 refund. I eventually did get it, even though I was
19 charged a \$40 reconnect fee, and that was
20 eventually taken off my bill.

21 My concern is that I went through four layers
22 of communication before my situation was resolved.
23 It was resolved. I volunteer at Clover Area
24 Assistance Center, in Clover. People come in to
25 get financial assistance, usually for utilities. I

1 could afford to pay the \$200 via credit card or
2 debit card, but most of them surely could not. How
3 many of them have not had their water restored?

4 My other concern is that, as a public school
5 teacher, retired public school teacher – and Mr.
6 Love was talking about the excessive bills the
7 school system has? Well, that's taxpayer money –
8 my money – that is being paid for the school system
9 to use the water, this excessive bill.

10 [3-minute signal]

11 Thank you.

12 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Ms. Viets, thank you very
13 much for being here.

14 Any questions?

15 **MR. WELLBORN:** Mr. Chairman, it sounds like
16 the issues were resolved, but, Ms. Viets, if there
17 are any outstanding, unresolved issues, I would
18 encourage you to go –

19 **WITNESS:** They are resolved now, but –

20 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you, ma'am.

21 **WITNESS:** – but from – it's been 60 days, so...

22 **MR. WELLBORN:** I understand. Thank you.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

25 Any other questions? Hang on, Ms. Viets.

1 **MR. KNOWLES:** Ms. Viets, if you wouldn't mind
2 speaking with Mr. Thompson, we'd greatly appreciate
3 it.

4 **WITNESS:** Okay. Where is Mr. Thompson?

5 **MR. KNOWLES:** He's behind you.

6 **MR. THOMPSON:** [Indicating.]

7 **WITNESS:** Oh. Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioners, questions?

9 [No response]

10 Thank you, Ms. Viets.

11 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

12 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Laura Parks. Laura
13 Parks, followed by John Kissinger, and Charles Wood
14 to the front, please. Charles Wood to the front.

15 [Witness affirmed]

16 THEREUPON came,

17 **L A U R A P A R K S ,**

18 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

19 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

20 **WITNESS:** Hello. Good evening. Wow. I've
21 heard a lot tonight. My name is Laura Parks, and
22 I've lived in the Fort Mill subdivision of Foxwood
23 now for 24, going on 25 years. Thank you for
24 allowing us to speak today.

25 We're here again after only two years ago, a

1 30 percent increase? Thirty percent. Now they
2 want 50, 55 percent – whatever they want. I
3 already have a bill that averages \$150 a month,
4 okay? You're going to tack on 55 percent. I could
5 have a water bill well over \$200, okay? Where does
6 it end? When is enough enough? How much money do
7 we still have to keep coming up with? Okay?

8 The average water/sewer bill in the Town of
9 Fort Mill – and I got this information right off
10 the Internet, off the South Carolina Rural
11 Infrastructure Authority – is \$75.65 for 5000
12 gallons of water, with sewer. I'm already paying
13 that double, and that's before the increase. The
14 increase hasn't even come yet.

15 I think it's ridiculous to even consider
16 granting their request and entertaining these
17 ramifications that this brazen piracy will bring
18 about for the residents that live here or any of
19 the communities that they service. Thank you.

20 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Parks.

21 Any questions? Ms. Dover.

22 **MS. DOVER:** Thank you.

23 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

24 **BY MS. DOVER:**

25 **Q** Ms. Parks, you mentioned the Foxwood subdivision?

1 **A** Yes, ma'am.

2 **Q** Do you know, roughly, how many homes are in that
3 subdivision?

4 **A** Two hundred sixteen [216] to two hundred twenty [220],
5 roughly. So, what, \$34,000 right now, at \$150 a month?

6 **Q** I'll trust your math. Thank you.

7 **A** I believe it's close. It's not accurate, on, but it's
8 close.

9 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Other questions?

10 [No response]

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Parks.

12 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

13 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you for being here.

14 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

15 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have John Kissinger.

16 John Kissinger, followed by Charles Wood and
17 Catherine Myrick.

18 [Witness affirmed]

19 THEREUPON came,

20 **J O H N K I S S I N G E R ,**

21 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

22 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

23 **WITNESS:** My name is John Kissinger. I live
24 in Timberlake, on Wheeltree Road. I'm new. I've
25 been here about three years.

1 The only reason I was here was I always
2 thought that our water was a little high. I've
3 lived in a whole lot of places, and I have never
4 had water as extreme as this, especially living
5 near Lake Wylie. But the fact of the matter is
6 that I didn't think a whole lot about it, because
7 utilities ask for more money here and there. But
8 when I realized what they were asking for and what
9 they're doing, it's ridiculous.

10 I refer you to *Wall Street Journal* on February
11 3rd. There was a write-up about Lake Wylie – I'm
12 sure a lot of you saw it. But I couldn't believe
13 that our rates are, you know, whatever, \$105 a
14 month on the average, and the average in this area
15 is about \$57. And when I saw those stats, I
16 figured, "That can't be." But talking to other
17 people, yes, it is. So why such a dramatic
18 increase?

19 I thought about it for a minute, and I said,
20 "Wait a minute, this is a private company." I've
21 only had one private company supply water to me in
22 the places that I've lived before. The rest of
23 them are all maintained and provided by the
24 government, the county, the city, whatever. And
25 I'm thinking, "Well, naturally, they have to make a

1 profit. They have to turn a profit.” And from
2 what other people were saying, there’s other layers
3 of water. Every time water changes hands to get to
4 the end user, there’s a fee. So it’s all fees.

5 So why don’t we just circumvent all that and
6 go back to a county or city, town, whatever,
7 supplying our water? Why do we have to have a
8 middleman who goes out there and says, “Yeah, I’ll
9 get you water.” He buys it from this guy, who
10 bought it from that guy, and then sells it to you.
11 It stands to reason they’re going to ask for more,
12 more, more. If we give them more, more, more,
13 they’re going to keep coming back. They’re like my
14 kid; I give him an ice cream –

15 [Laughter]

16 I give him an ice cream cone, and he wants
17 another one. You know, it just never ends. So
18 somewhere here, we have to put our foot down and
19 say that’s it, okay? Only so much. And I think we
20 pay enough. I was shocked the first time I saw my
21 water bill. I told my wife, I said, “In the last
22 year before we moved here, that’s what I paid for
23 three months.” Okay? So I’m not – but I’m not
24 going to bore you to death with all the issues,
25 like not getting a phone call from them saying

1 we're under a boil alert, or anything of that
2 nature. Communications from Blue Granite is
3 terrible. If my granddaughters don't have school
4 tomorrow, everybody in the world is getting a phone
5 call from the school system. We can't get nothing
6 from these people saying it's either there, we've
7 got to boil the water, and, oh, the boil alert has
8 been lifted? You know, you find this out through
9 hearsay.

10 [3-minute signal]

11 Thank you.

12 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Kissinger.
13 Questions?

14 [No response]

15 Thank you very much, sir.

16 **WITNESS:** [Inaudible] everybody else did. Okay.

17 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

18 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Charles Wood, followed by
19 Catherine Myrick, and Shawne Heeren to the front,
20 please. Catherine Myrick, and Shawne Heeren to the
21 front.

22 [Witness affirmed]

23 THEREUPON came,

24 **C H A R L E S W O O D ,**
25 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

1 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

2 **WITNESS:** I am Charles Wood. I live on
3 Cedarwood Court in River Hills Plantation, Lake
4 Wylie, South Carolina.

5 My wife and I have lived on Cedarwood Court
6 for 42 years, and for 42 years we've had to put up
7 with Utilities, Incorporated, and now Blue Granite
8 Water. And the cost of our water for just my wife
9 and I – no yard watering, no washing of the
10 automobile – we found other sources – and just no
11 extra water use – we even have two-and-a-half-
12 gallon toilets, trying to save money. So a 55
13 percent proposed increase is hard to fathom for
14 just distributing water and sewer, and not
15 processing any of it.

16 In April of 2019, our sewer pipe to the
17 manhole in the street backed up, causing \$16,000
18 worth of damage to the interior of our home. Yes.
19 Blue Granite jumped on it quickly and got in the
20 restoration company from Rock Hill, who immediately
21 tore up all the carpeting and the drywall and the
22 teak flooring that we had in our house. And the
23 problem was a decayed sewer pipe that they don't
24 have any way of looking to see what the condition
25 of the sewer pipe is. So three weeks of living

1 around the neighborhood – thank God, our daughter
2 and son-in-law live in the neighborhood – we
3 finally got back to using our house. Very, very
4 inconvenient.

5 Now, I also am the ex-chairman of the Lake
6 Wylie Chamber of Commerce, 350 members. One of our
7 members, if this rate increase goes into effect,
8 will be paying \$100,000 for water. It is the YMCA
9 Camp Thunderbird, which has a very active summer
10 program for campers that like to take a shower in
11 the morning and a shower in the evening and use the
12 commodes during the day. So we're very concerned,
13 as a Chamber of Commerce, for our 350 members, who
14 will all experience, like ReStore, the increases in
15 water use and water cost.

16 So, gentlemen, thank you for being here, and
17 if there's anything further you need from me, let
18 me know.

19 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Wood.

20 Questions?

21 [No response]

22 Thank you very much for being here, sir.

23 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

24 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Catherine Myrick, followed by
25 Shawne Heeren and Trevor Higgins. Trevor Higgins

1 to the front, please.

2 [Witness affirmed]

3 THEREUPON came,

4 C A T H E R I N E M Y R I C K , D . M . D . ,
5 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

6 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name.

7 WITNESS: My name is Catherine Myrick. I live
8 on Autumn Falls Drive, in Townhomes on The Cove,
9 which is on 274, across from Crowders Creek
10 Elementary School.

11 I feel like I'm lucky, after listening to
12 everything that's been said tonight, because my
13 water bill is under \$100.

14 [Laughter]

15 Now, I live alone. I run my dishwasher maybe
16 once a week. I don't cook a lot, because I live
17 alone. I do one load of laundry a week. My water
18 bill is \$81, averages. I – according to my bills,
19 I could go in between 35 and 30 gallons of water a
20 day. I had the insides of my toilets regutted, to
21 make sure they're not leaking during the day. I
22 don't know how I'm using 30 gallons of water. My
23 cats don't know how to flush the toilet.

24 [Laughter]

25 Now, I also am a dentist, and I have a dental

1 office in the Town of Clover. I pulled the past
2 two water bills for my dental office, which uses
3 water on every patient. It has two working
4 commodes, which use more water than the ones at my
5 house do. My water bill for my office is less than
6 my house. I have my water bills here with me. I
7 would be happy to share them with anybody who wants
8 to see them.

9 Also, this summer, when we had the water
10 outages, I got notifications that we were under
11 restricted water use – now, this was while it was
12 raining every day? But we had no water. But when
13 the water main broke, the only way I knew, I didn't
14 have water coming into my house. The only way I
15 knew I was supposed to boil water is because
16 Allison Love posted on her Facebook page.

17 My aunt just passed away two weeks ago, lives
18 right behind me. Her water bill averages \$95 a
19 month. She was never notified when she had to
20 stop – had to boil water. And even now, I don't
21 know when my water has been cut off, unless I turn
22 the water on and it spits at me, and then I'm like,
23 "Hm, I bet we had a water outage." I don't receive
24 any phone calls. But I did when we were under
25 [indicating] "water restrictions." Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, ma'am.

2 Any questions?

3 MR. KENDREE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 CROSS EXAMINATION

5 BY MR. KENDREE:

6 Q Could you describe the water restrictions that were in
7 place, please?

8 A Let's see, we weren't supposed to wash our cars – which
9 I didn't worry about. We weren't supposed to water our
10 lawns. For the townhome community, I don't worry about
11 that, either. So, considering how little water I
12 actually use, I decided to go ahead and wash my face
13 every day.

14 [Laughter]

15 Q Thank you. And what was the duration of the restriction
16 in place?

17 A I cannot remember exactly, but it went on and on and on.
18 It was unbelievably long. And, like I said, it was not
19 during a drought period; it wasn't raining every single
20 day.

21 MR. KENDREE: Thank you, ma'am.

22 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

23 Commissioner Belser.

24 <

25 <

EXAMINATION**BY INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:****Q** Dr. Myrick?**A** I'm sorry.**Q** Hi. In the last 12 to 18 months, do you have an idea of how many boil-water advisories you should have received?**A** I know of three from Facebook, from what Allison posted. One time, I did – was able to log onto the website and type in my address to see if I was under one, still, and it said not enough information.**Q** Is that how you – can you check your account and check information by logging on through the website?**A** I don't normally do it, because I don't –**Q** Okay.**A** I mean, I really don't know. It will happen while I'm at work. Now, when the Town of Clover loses water, I get a phone call very quickly.**Q** And when you got the phone calls about the restricted water usage, were messages left if you weren't there?**A** They were on my answering machine when I got home.**Q** Okay.**A** Yes.**INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:** Thank you, very much.**CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

1 COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD: Mr. Chairman?

2 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Commissioner Whitfield.

3 EXAMINATION

4 BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:

5 Q Dr. Myrick.

6 A I'm sorry. I'm sorry [indicating].

7 Q I just wanted to thank you for your testimony and to ask
8 you if you wanted to redact your account number and
9 other information, and leave your bill and enter it in,
10 make it part of the record? Do you want to –

11 A I just handed it over to Allison Love. And, yes, I will
12 be happy to do so.

13 Q If you want to see one of our staff members, and we
14 can –

15 A Okay.

16 Q – make sure you redact –

17 A And just for –

18 Q – the appropriate information.

19 A Apples and apples are on there. I have a water fee and
20 sewage fee on both. The only difference is I have a
21 DHEC fee for my office.

22 COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD: Well, if you would
23 get that over Mr. Richardson.

24 WITNESS: [Indicating.]

25 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: We'll mark it as Exhibit

1 44, for identification.

2 [WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 44 was
3 marked for identification, with receipt
4 into evidence to be later ruled upon]

5 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

6 **MR. BOCKMAN:** We have Shawne Heeren? Shawne
7 Heeren, followed by Trevor Higgins and Frank Bynum.
8 Frank Bynum to the front, please.

9 [Witness affirmed]

10 THEREUPON came,

11 **S H A W N E H E E R E N ,**
12 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

13 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

14 **WITNESS:** Shawne Heeren, and I live in the
15 Foxwood subdivision on Swamp Fox Drive. We've been
16 there 14 years.

17 When I first moved in, the quality of water
18 with Utilities, Inc., you couldn't drink it. It
19 smelled like sulfur. And I had gone to a couple of
20 meetings and listened, and they blamed it on Wicoff
21 Color, which is the corporation that's right beside
22 us. We were on wells, at the time. And they said,
23 "Well, it must be their chemicals coming into your
24 wells."

25 Well, the long and the short of it was we

1 begged Utilities, Inc., to please help us hook up
2 to Fort Mill water, to Rock Hill water. And we
3 finally did.

4 But before then, before then, I went to speak
5 at a meeting such as this, and under oath, I told
6 Utilities, Inc., that they weren't reading their
7 meters correctly. And how I knew that was, every
8 month that I got a bill, it was only a few cents'
9 difference. This was over a period of four or five
10 months. And I said, "You cannot be reading those
11 meters. You just cannot. I want to pay for what I
12 use, not for what you guesstimate."

13 Well, they didn't like that, because the next
14 day I got a phone call from Utilities, Inc., and
15 they told me I'd better retract that statement.
16 And it scared me to death, because I had two young
17 boys. Now, I'm back here again, and I'm not
18 retracting any statement nor have I ever. My bill
19 averages \$150 a month, and I read my meter every
20 day. Maybe Wednesdays I don't, because I'm at
21 church, but it's dark when I get home. But I take
22 my meter reading and I put it on my calendar, and I
23 check my bill. And they're not – they're not –
24 when they say they read the meter, it's off.

25 Our meters in Foxwood subdivision are very

1 old. When it rains and I go out to read my meter,
2 I got this much water [indicating] standing on top
3 of my meter. I can't get through it, to read it.
4 So how could they, on the same day?

5 I don't like calling people names. It's not
6 for me to judge. But they're lining their pockets.
7 They're piggybacking on Rock Hill water. They are
8 not fair, they're not right. I don't have –

9 [3-minute signal]

10 – the statistics that other people do, you
11 know. Thank you for listening.

12 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Heeren.

13 Any questions?

14 **MR. WELLBORN:** Just a couple of questions,
15 here.

16 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

17 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

18 **Q** You mentioned some meter-read errors or issues. When
19 was that?

20 **A** That was back in 2005-2006-ish.

21 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you.

22 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

24 Any other questions of the parties?

25 [No response]

Commissioners?

[No response]

Thank you very much, Ms. Heeren.

WITNESS: Thank you, very much.

[WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

MR. BOCKMAN: Up next we have Trevor Higgins,
followed by Frank Bynum and Julia Csokasy.

[Witness affirmed]

THEREUPON came,

T R E V O R H I G G I N S ,
who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name for
the record.

WITNESS: My name is Trevor Higgins, and I
live in The Landing, Shady Knoll Court.

So, good evening, Councilmembers, community
members, and those representing Blue Granite. Thank
you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and
experiences of Blue Granite. My wife and I moved,
along with our two little kids, to The Landing in
September 2019, from Pineville, North Carolina.
And right now I'm not here to discuss the customer
service issues; that's why we're not gathered here
together as a community. But I am here to discuss
how I'm paying an already increased rate for water,

1 and the company responds it wants to further
2 increase that rate. Now, I understand that they
3 buy water and sell it to make money. I'm not naive
4 to the fact that they have to make a profit. But a
5 further increase is highway robbery, considering we
6 do not have another option for a water company.

7 The average water bill, when living in
8 Charlotte, was \$68 per month. Now that same bill
9 averages \$159 per month. The extremely high rates,
10 along with the billing issues – which include water
11 being turned off without notice; also being charged
12 for three times the amount of water actually used,
13 which took three meter readings to correct; the
14 inability to use another option – gives us a clear
15 picture that there's an issue, and a further rate
16 increase is not a viable solution unless an
17 additional water company option is able to be
18 provided.

19 If you add that increase up, its roughly
20 \$1100, which, against the median income in South
21 Carolina – which is nearly \$10,922 below the
22 national average – this increase, not the total
23 bill but just the increase, is 2 percent of that,
24 of the annual median salary income. So that's
25 \$1100 that I could use for my children's education,

1 \$1100 I could use for my retirement plan, \$1100 I
2 could use to support my community in different
3 initiatives, transportation, and sustainable
4 community growth.

5 So, as you deliberate, I just ask that you
6 take that \$1100 into consideration and what that
7 means for other people. Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Higgins.

9 Any questions?

10 [No response]

11 Commissioners.

12 **INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:** Yes, sir.

13 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you – oh,
14 Commissioner Belser.

15 **EXAMINATION**

16 **BY INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:**

17 **Q** Mr. Higgins.

18 **A** Yes.

19 **Q** Tell me again about your billing issues.

20 **A** Yeah. So, in December of 2019, we were billed for
21 11,822 gallons of water. It averaged 3500 dollars –
22 3500 gallons over the last three years, between
23 Charlotte and Lake Wylie, and that's our daily usage for
24 two adults, a baby, and another baby. So, that took –
25 it just actually got corrected about two weeks ago. We

1 finally got a credit on our bill. So, what, three
2 months to get that corrected? And three meter readings,
3 by the way – three different meter readings, which I had
4 to call and use some persuasive language to get people
5 to come out –

6 [Laughter]

7 – and say there's no way I can use 11,000 gallons
8 of water.

9 Q And were you disconnected at some point?

10 A Yeah, that was in – that was a different incidence.

11 Q Okay.

12 A So, in January, like people that you've we've heard from
13 before, we were just randomly disconnected without
14 notice.

15 Q You had no notice.

16 A No notice. Just a pink letter and our water didn't
17 work. I also had a pregnant wife and two babies, so
18 that was really pleasant.

19 Q Are you paying your bill online, or writing a check –

20 A It's automatic draft.

21 Q – or automatic draft?

22 A Uh-huh.

23 Q And did you check your bank account?

24 A Yeah, it's always drafted.

25 Q And it was –

1 A The bill was –

2 Q – drafted?

3 A – paid, correct. The bill was –

4 Q It was drafted and you were disconnected.

5 A Uh-huh.

6 Q Thank you, very much. I appreciate your testimony.

7 A Absolutely.

8 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

9 Commissioners, other questions?

10 [No response]

11 Thank you, very much. Appreciate you being
12 here.

13 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

14 MR. BOCKMAN: Next we have Frank Bynum. Frank
15 Bynum, Julia Csokasy, and Jeannie Robbins. Jeannie
16 Robbins to the front, please?

17 [Witness affirmed]

18 THEREUPON came,

19 F R A N K B Y N U M ,

20 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

21 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name for
22 the record.

23 WITNESS: My name is Frank Bynum. I live in
24 Foxwood, like many of the other speakers.

25 Our subdivision is next to another subdivision

1 which is much more expensive than the houses in
2 ours. Our houses run about \$200,000 and up; the
3 subdivision next to us, known as Springfield, they
4 run about \$750,000 and up. I have a couple of
5 water bills from one of those residents. The water
6 bill for November – and this was a family, I think,
7 of two or three people, husband and wife and I'm
8 not sure how many kids. In November 2019, it was
9 \$77; and in December 2019, it was \$82. On the
10 other hand, my water bill in Foxwood – as I say,
11 much less expensive subdivision and so on – in
12 December, was \$160; in January, \$142.

13 So I don't see any relationship between what
14 I'm having to pay for water, and the people next
15 door to me have to pay for water, except that I
16 have Blue Granite and the subdivision next to me
17 has York County water.

18 There are only two people in my family. We
19 don't use an excessive amount of water. I never
20 water the lawn; can't afford to. And I consider
21 this increase – projected increase to 50 percent
22 just outrageous. Our property bill each year is
23 about \$1000. Our water bill now is \$1800 a year,
24 and with a 50 percent increase it'll be \$2700 a
25 year. So people that worry about their property

1 taxes going up have nothing to be considered as
2 serious as their water bill.

3 Thank you, very much.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Bynum.
5 Questions?

6 [No response]

7 Commissioners?

8 [No response]

9 Mr. Kendree, did you have a question?

10 **MR. KENDREE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

12 **BY MR. KENDREE:**

13 **Q** Mr. Bynum, if you said earlier, I apologize. How long
14 have you lived in Foxwood?

15 **A** Twelve years.

16 **Q** And do you have any knowledge of the maintenance of the
17 lagoon system there?

18 **A** Oh, yes – not maintenance of it. I know about the
19 lagoon system.

20 **Q** Have you observed or noticed any maintenance on that
21 system in your 12 years?

22 **A** I have not.

23 **MR. KENDREE:** Thank you.

24 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

25 Commissioners, questions?

1 [No response]

2 Thank you, Mr. Bynum.

3 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

4 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Julia Csokasy,
5 followed by Jeannie Robbins and Chris Robbins.
6 Jeannie Robbins and Chris Robbins to the front,
7 please?

8 [Witness affirmed]

9 THEREUPON came,

10 **J U L I A C S O K A S Y ,**
11 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

12 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
13 the record.

14 **WITNESS:** Julia Csokasy. I'm just going to
15 read you what I wrote, because I'm super-nervous.
16 Okay.

17 So my name is Julia Csokasy. I'm a four-year
18 resident of Lake Wylie. I live in the River Hills
19 subdivision on Tall Pines Court. My understanding
20 is that Blue Granite is requesting customer service
21 rate increases not to cover repair costs and
22 upgrades that will directly benefit its customers,
23 but rather for rebranding expenses, new offices,
24 furniture, landscaping, supplies, and decor for
25 those new offices, larger salaries, benefits, and

1 pension for employees, payroll taxes, capitalized
2 time, transportation costs related to rebranding,
3 and the changeover to digital meters, just to name
4 a few.

5 While it seems obvious that charging its
6 customers for optional expenses that are unrelated
7 to the level of service they will receive is
8 outrageous, I'm here to protest these proposed
9 increases by sharing my family's experience with
10 Blue Granite just over the last year.

11 The clean and reliable water supply is a basic
12 human need. Since becoming Blue Granite customers,
13 we've endured multiple water outages and boil-water
14 advisories. In just a six-month span in 2019
15 alone, we were without running water five separate
16 times: May 9th, May 14th, June 18th, July 20th,
17 and October 9th. The outage in October forced
18 schools to close and caused local businesses
19 countless dollars in lost revenue from being unable
20 to serve their customers.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Ma'am? Ma'am, Ms. Csokasy,
22 just a minute.

23 [Discussion off the record]

24 I know you're nervous. Our court reporter's
25 computer jumped, so —

[Laughter]

WITNESS: The clock is still counting down, there.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Mr. Richardson, cut that clock off.

WITNESS: Yeah, can I get back a little of that 20 seconds I just lost? I've got a lot to say here.

INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER: You'll be fine.

[Discussion off the record due to technical difficulties.]

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: We're going to take a short break while Ms. Wheat gets the computer going. We'll start back in between five and ten minutes.

[WHEREUPON, a recess was taken from 8:18 to 8:36 p.m.]

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Okay, Ms. Csokasy, I'm so sorry that we had that happen. So, we will let you start again.

WITNESS: Okay. Do you want me to start at the beginning and slow down? Would that be better –

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: No.

WITNESS: – or just pick up where I left off?

COURT REPORTER: I have it up to where –

1 **WITNESS:** Okay, I'll go back –

2 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Yeah, pick back up where
3 you left off. You'll have plenty of time to give
4 it.

5 **WITNESS:** Okay. So, I just listed all the
6 dates that we had water outages.

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Yes, ma'am.

8 **WITNESS:** Okay. So, the outage in October
9 forced schools to close and cost local businesses
10 countless dollars of lost revenue from being unable
11 to serve their customers.

12 I can't speak for every Blue Granite customer,
13 but our family, personally, decided not to patron
14 our local Lake Wylie restaurants for several days
15 following each of these outages, because we were
16 unsure of the safety of the water supply.

17 Also during these outages, we had an infant at
18 home who was dependent upon formula mixed with Blue
19 Granite water supply for every meal. Because of
20 the lack of running water and uncertainty
21 surrounding the safety of the water thereafter, we
22 were forced to purchase bottled water, the
23 availability of which was never guaranteed, due to
24 the increased demand of thousands of people who
25 were also without running water.

1 We were also placed under a strict water ban,
2 beginning May 31st and ending October 7th of last
3 year. During peak summer months, we were forbidden
4 from filling up our swimming pools, watering our
5 dying lawns, or washing our pollen-coated cars.
6 Blue Granite paid their employees to ride around in
7 company vehicles, looking for offenders so we could
8 be threatened and fined. All of this was imposed
9 upon us because Blue Granite was unable to supply
10 enough water to our growing community. This lack
11 of proper infrastructure is inexplicable and
12 absolutely unacceptable.

13 So, is this what we get for the small fortune
14 that we pay each month for this basic human need?
15 According to a 2019 CBS news article, the national
16 average for water-and-sewer bills in our country is
17 \$104 per month. A typical monthly bill for my
18 household is \$160. Eighty dollars and nineteen
19 cents [\$80.19] of that is billed before a single
20 drop of water is even used.

21 When I first called Blue Granite when we moved
22 to Lake Wylie, in 2016, I inquired about this
23 upfront monthly cost that doesn't include actual
24 usage, and what I was told on the phone by the
25 person I spoke with was that it was to pay for

1 repairs and upkeep. There are 30,000 homes being
2 serviced by Blue Granite in the State of South
3 Carolina. That's almost \$2½ million that they are
4 charging their customers every single month, before
5 a single drop of water is used. Where is all of
6 that money going, and why do they think it's okay
7 to ask for more? Are they seriously spending
8 almost \$30 million a year on upkeep?

9 And why is Blue Granite not issuing credits on
10 our bills each time we are without water or unable
11 to use the water unless we boil it first? Why is
12 Blue Granite not reimbursing us for the cost of
13 bottled water when we all have to buy it each time
14 they fail at their duty to provide safe drinking
15 water to their customers?

16 The amount we're paying now is unconscionable.
17 Further increasing that amount to pay for new
18 offices and the rebranding is just laughable.

19 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, ma'am.

20 Any questions? Yes, ma'am.

21 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

22 **BY MS. DOVER:**

23 **Q** Thank you, Ms. Csokasy. Are you a water and a sewer
24 customer?

25 **A** Yes.

1 Q Okay. And you mentioned a few times when you were
2 unsure about the safety of the water? Did the company
3 communicate anything?

4 A Like everyone else has said, the communication's been
5 very spotty. Usually, if we do get a boil-water
6 advisory – which sometimes we get, sometimes we don't –
7 it's not until several hours after the water is shut off
8 and come back on again, so we've been using dirty water,
9 potentially, for several hours before we even know. And
10 most of my information that I've gotten, personally, has
11 been from NextDoor.com or Allison's Facebook page, not
12 from Blue Granite.

13 The only time I can remember getting any consistent
14 communication from Blue Granite was when it was time to
15 stop boiling water, a few days later, but that, again, I
16 don't think I've gotten that every time.

17 Q And how would they communicate that?

18 A E-mail.

19 Q E-mail?

20 A E-mail.

21 Q And you said the water restrictions went into effect May
22 31st? And I didn't catch the end of that.

23 A It was October 7th.

24 Q October 7th. And how did they let you know about that?

25 A I think it was e-mail.

1 **VOICE:** It was.

2 **WITNESS:** It was e-mail? Okay. It's been a
3 while.

4 **MS. DOVER:** Thank you.

5 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

6 Other questions? Commissioners?

7 [No response]

8 Thank you, ma'am. Sorry we had to do it in
9 two spots.

10 **WITNESS:** That's all right.

11 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

12 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next, we have Jeannie Robbins,
13 Chris Robbins, and Sabrina Anthony. Sabrina
14 Anthony down front, please?

15 [Witness affirmed]

16 THEREUPON came,

17 **J E A N N I E R O B B I N S ,**

18 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

19 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name for
20 the record.

21 **WITNESS:** Jeannie Robbins. I live on
22 Brookside Drive, in Fort Mill, in the Foxwood
23 subdivision. Thank you for having this meeting and
24 letting us talk tonight.

25 I've lived in Foxwood for 12 years. I've

1 lived through Utilities, Inc., Carolina Water, and
2 Blue Granite. All have left a bad taste in my
3 mouth, literally.

4 I'm flabbergasted by the rate-increase request
5 of approximately 50 percent. Thirty percent, two
6 years ago, was a challenge; this is bordering
7 insane. This far exceeds the inflation rate and
8 cost of living, and that with a booming economy
9 right now. I've noticed that we've lost many
10 neighbors in the last two years, and I'm sure it
11 has to do with the non-quality and cost of our
12 famous water company, Blue Granite. And you would
13 think, with the housing shortage in Fort Mill, that
14 we'd see a great return on investment, but our past
15 neighbors have sold lower than the average in Fort
16 Mill. I wonder if it has to do with the amount we
17 spend on water and sewer.

18 I'm pretty sure that if Blue Granite's allowed
19 to continue in their current request for rate
20 hikes, that my water payment will soon exceed my
21 house payment.

22 In 12 years, I've replaced fixtures when their
23 water was undrinkable and pipes in my house from
24 corrosion. In 2018, I had to replace my sewer line
25 because the sewer was backing up into my

1 downstairs. Lo and behold, the issue was not mine
2 but Blue Granite's – then Carolina Water. After
3 the plumbers dug up my yard and replaced the pipe
4 all the way to the hookup tap, they could see roots
5 in the clay pipes. Yes, I said clay pipes. That's
6 how old the pipes are.

7 Then I had to get the water company to come
8 out and cut out the roots. They did come out, but
9 refused to replace the pipes because it would be
10 too expensive. They told me, "Do you know how much
11 that would cost us?" And I said, "It cost me a few
12 thousand, just to verify that my lines were clear.
13 How are you going to guarantee that the
14 inspections – that your pipes will not fail again?"
15 They said they would put me on a rotation of pipes
16 that are inspected and, if need be, would cut the
17 roots out. This was supposed to be every three
18 months, and I've found that it's more like six
19 months, and even then they do not always cut the
20 roots. My neighbor informed me that they have to
21 do the same for her, and her insurance company at
22 one point sued the water company. With this being
23 said, what did the last increase do for me?
24 Nothing. They spent zero on our infrastructure.
25 They only show up if water is spewing from the

1 ground, and I'm pretty sure we pay for that unused
2 water, too. We have only received band-aids from
3 them, and not even the good ones but the store
4 brands.

5 In September 2018, I received a bill stating
6 that I had used 10,070 gallons of water, with only
7 two people in my household. My average usage from
8 January through August was 3300 gallons per month.
9 I called the water company and was basically told,
10 "Too bad. You must've used that much water."

11 I personally don't believe that the meters are
12 read on a monthly basis, and that they only trued
13 up the water bill after their last rate increase.
14 I filed a complaint with the ORS, and the water
15 company replaced and tested my meter, and then –

16 [3-minute signal]

17 – had the nerve to tell me that it was not
18 reading the meter water correctly, but more water
19 was going through. But they were going to let that
20 slide and did not even work with me on the bill.

21 Can I finish? I have a little bit more.

22 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Go ahead.

23 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

24 Complaints against the utility are consistent
25 and numerous, by far exceeding any other water

1 utility in volume and duration. Yet, they have
2 some of the highest rates in the State of South
3 Carolina. They are consistently fined for
4 improperly getting rid of waste and expect us, the
5 consumer, to pay for their bad management.

6 The last time I checked, I was not an investor
7 in their company who should be expected to pay for
8 overhead expense. This includes paying their legal
9 fees, the creation of a storm reserve fund,
10 expenses linked to their name change, remodel of
11 their headquarters, or moving expenses. This in no
12 way provided a benefit to me or my neighbors.

13 I would also like to know why I should get
14 charged for unaccounted water and why they cannot
15 or will not provide specific water-loss audit
16 information. The use of contractors instead of
17 their own employees cannot possibly be cost-
18 effective, nor inspire confidence in their
19 customers.

20 I am a consumer who is used to paying for
21 quality. I don't see quality in the nonservice
22 that we receive from Blue Granite and, therefore, I
23 plea to the Commission to stop the insanity and
24 deny the rate increase – possibly, decrease it.

25 Thank you for your time.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Robbins.

2 Any questions?

3 **MR. WELLBORN:** Just a quick question, Mr.
4 Chairman.

5 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

6 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

7 **Q** Ms. Robbins, it sounds like, after your high water bill,
8 that the company replaced the meter? Is that right?

9 **A** They did.

10 **Q** And was that issue resolved by the company?

11 **A** We have not had another bill that high, since then.

12 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

15 Other questions? Mr. Knowles.

16 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

17 **BY MR. KNOWLES:**

18 **Q** Are you continuing to have issues with the pipe
19 inspections?

20 **A** I do. I have to call them regularly.

21 **Q** Okay.

22 **A** Typically, I don't go through customer service. I have
23 a direct phone number for one of their employees, and he
24 will call me back and tell me that he has to call the
25 contractor to find out any information on my place.

1 Q Okay. Thank you, ma'am. You might try talking with Mr.
2 Ryder Thompson, behind you –

3 A Sure.

4 Q – to deal with this issue.

5 A [Nodding head.]

6 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Commissioner Belser.

7 EXAMINATION

8 BY INTERIM VICE CHAIR BELSER:

9 Q Thank you for being here. I was going to ask you about
10 when you mentioned, in your testimony, the contractor
11 versus their employees.

12 A Right.

13 Q And so the contractor's a person that comes out to
14 inspect the pipes for roots; is –

15 A Yes.

16 Q – that correct?

17 A Yes.

18 Q Okay. Do you know of – is that the only time you've
19 seen or have dealt with a contractor versus their
20 employees?

21 A For me personally, yes.

22 Q Thank you, very much.

23 A You're welcome.

24 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

25 Any other questions?

[No response]

Thank you, Ms. Robbins.

WITNESS: Thank you.

[WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

MR. BOCKMAN: Next we have Chris Robbins, followed by Sabrina Anthony and Jim Ewers. Sabrina Anthony and Jim Ewers, please.

[Witness affirmed]

THEREUPON came,

C H R I S R O B B I N S ,
who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name for the record.

WITNESS: Chris Robbins. As you may have figured out, that was my wife. She's a whole lot better eloquently speaking than I am. I don't have the terminology she has. She takes care of the bills; I take care of trying to get the money in to pay the bills, as both of us work. So with that being said, I appreciate you giving me a few minutes to express my feelings and my opinions about this.

As she stated, we've had issues in the past. We've had issues with having to replace our own lines. Come to find out it wasn't our lines; it

1 was their lines. So, needless to say, there's been
2 countless amount of issues. Well, in the last two
3 years, I have currently went to work for a
4 utility – utilities, so now I understand a little
5 bit more about water and sewer. I'm currently
6 working for a utility department that has some of –
7 what was their name? Where'd she go? What was
8 their prior name – what was the prior name, before
9 Blue Granite?

10 **VOICES:** Carolina Water.

11 **WITNESS:** Okay, so I don't –

12 **VOICE:** I can't hear through that microphone.

13 **WITNESS:** Okay. So, anyway, their prior name.
14 And in doing so, I go out now and I dig up some of
15 these lines where they've repaired them. So I see
16 some of these repairs. I see what I would call
17 patch kits. We are told and instructed that, due
18 to their reputation they left behind, that we're
19 not going to do that. If we see this, we're to
20 take it out of line – out of the ground and replace
21 the line, period, to ensure that the customer has
22 safe, quality water.

23 What do I mean by this? When I go out and
24 find a leak and I dig it up, and it has a shark
25 bite on it, or it has a hose – not a hose bib, but

1 a – a barbed fitting on it, we're told to take it
2 out of the ground; we don't want that. We replace
3 it with quality parts, brass parts, where I work at
4 right now.

5 I have yet to see anyone come to my
6 neighborhood – and that being said, I want you to
7 understand I understand the service part of it,
8 because I service customers, but I am a customer.
9 So I'm sitting here seeing them come to my
10 neighborhood, and they do not in no way, shape, or
11 form perform the services that we do at a lower
12 rate. They're asking for 50 to 55 percent
13 increase, and it's my understanding that it is
14 something to do with infrastructure. Where?
15 Because I'm working in it, so I see what they left
16 behind. I also live in it, so I see what they do.

17 My question is, why should you give that kind
18 of increase for services that's not rendered? Not
19 to mention, the prior reputation that I know
20 countless people have already described here. One
21 of the reasons that we are to do what we do, where
22 I work, is because we're trying to get rid of the
23 reputation –

24 [3-minute signal]

25 – that was left behind.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Robbins.
2 Questions. Yes, sir.

3 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

4 **BY MR. KNOWLTON:**

5 **Q** Mr. Robbins, are you doing any work at Tega Cay?

6 **A** Yes, sir.

7 **Q** So you're responsible for the fact that the spills have
8 stopped now, since the company changed ownership?

9 **A** We do our very best.

10 **MR. KNOWLTON:** Thank you, sir.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

12 Any other questions? Commissioners? Oh, Ms.
13 Dover.

14 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

15 **BY MS. DOVER:**

16 **Q** Mr. Robbins, do you remember when the issue with the
17 roots in the clay pipes was?

18 **A** It was about three to three and a half years ago. I
19 don't remember the date, but I definitely got pictures,
20 because I was out there digging that pipe up. I was the
21 one digging it up, digging the trench, and taking the
22 pipe out, to get to the root of the problem, which ended
23 up being – as she said – the clay pipes.

24 **Q** And you still have the clay pipes today?

25 **A** Yes, ma'am.

1 MS. DOVER: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Commissioners?

3 [No response]

4 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Robbins.

5 WITNESS: Thank you.

6 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

7 MR. BOCKMAN: Next is Sabrina Anthony,
8 followed by Jim Ewers, followed by Rand Ernst.
9 Sabrina Anthony, Jim Ewers, and Rand Ernst.

10 [Witness affirmed]

11 THEREUPON came,

12 S A B R I N A A N T H O N Y ,
13 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

14 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name for
15 the record.

16 WITNESS: Sabrina Anthony. I live on
17 Rhododendron, in Clover, South Carolina.

18 And I'm here to say that I am not approving
19 this rate increase. My bill is currently around
20 \$108. It's just me and my husband, in our
21 [indicating] "retirement home" that we purchased,
22 not knowing that the water was going to be an issue
23 here. We first moved here; we bought brand-new
24 linens that the water changed black, dull, and
25 became just not usable. They're just not usable

1 anymore. And water wasn't where we could drink it.
2 I was smelling bleach in the water. There was
3 black stuff accumulating everywhere. So we
4 invested in a whole-house water system, to clean
5 the water and also with an osmosis so we could
6 drink the water. It was just not drinkable, and it
7 was not usable to clean our clothes or bathe in.
8 That's how we felt. So we invested in this, at our
9 own expense, to clean water that is supposed to be
10 clean before it reaches our home.

11 At the rate that this keeps increasing –
12 which, if they get this increase here, that'll be
13 an 85 percent increase in two years; that's a lot –
14 I don't know how we could afford to retire here. I
15 think that we should sell our home – I'm talking to
16 my husband. We should sell and move out, and
17 anybody else who plans to retire here, should sell
18 their home and get out, because you're not going to
19 be able to sell it when people find out they have
20 to pay \$200-\$300 for water. It's just not
21 feasible. The prices we pay for water will be
22 higher than what we pay in taxes, to live here,
23 once our mortgage is paid off. I don't know how
24 this could be a community that people could afford
25 to live in.

1 So we're – I'm thinking of selling and moving
2 out, as soon as we possibly can, because our water
3 bills – we already pay \$1300 a year; after this
4 increase, it will be over \$2000 a year, and that
5 will be more than my property taxes for the year.
6 I don't know how people can sustain this, how they
7 can live in this community, and expect they'll
8 retire here.

9 I've heard so many people who are retired and
10 live here, and I don't know how they can afford
11 this. The other utilities – gas, electric – they
12 haven't asked for any kind of rate increases. In
13 fact, they work with you; I mean, we put solar
14 panels in. We wanted this to be our home. We put
15 solar panels in to keep the electric bill down.
16 Right now, my electric bill – the water bill is
17 higher than my electric bill and my gas bill,
18 combined. I don't know how this is fair, and I
19 don't know how they can keep coming back every year
20 or every two years and ask for more and more and
21 more, and the quality is just not there. I mean,
22 we invested in this water system, so that – because
23 this is supposed to be our home forever, and I'm
24 just not seeing that that is possible, to do that
25 here.

1 So, I hope that you say no to this increase,
2 and, if you say yes, that it's substantially way
3 less than what they're asking for, because I don't
4 really think – for the service that we get – it is
5 worth it. And that's all I have to say. Thank you
6 for allowing me this time.

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, ma'am. Hang on.
8 Any questions?

9 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

10 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

11 **Q** Just real quick, this – I'm sorry. Ms. Anthony, you had
12 some water-quality issues? About when was that?

13 **A** It was from the first year that we moved in here, in
14 2016. I had your guys come out, and I showed him my
15 brand-new towels versus the ones I had just washed. We
16 hadn't even had those towels a month, and they were
17 turning black and dingy.

18 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

21 Any other questions? Mr. Knowles.

22 **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

24 **BY MR. KNOWLES:**

25 **Q** Ms. Anthony, are these water-quality issues continuing?

1 **A** Well, I don't know, because I have a whole-house water
2 system, so my water is pretty good, right now, because I
3 pay to have it clean, and I pay to have it serviced
4 every year, at a cost of \$300-\$400 a year, to have it
5 serviced so that water does stay, because when they pull
6 out the filters they're absolutely filthy.

7 **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you, Ms. Anthony.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

9 Commissioner Whitfield.

10 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Thank you, Mr.

11 Chairman.

12 **EXAMINATION**

13 **BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:**

14 **Q** Ms. Anthony, Mr. Knowles basically asked my question, so
15 your testimony is that you don't really know at the
16 current time if your discoloration issues, bleach smell,
17 all these other things, if they – you don't really know
18 if they were ever corrected or not, because you've
19 invested – and how much do you say you have invested in
20 this system?

21 **A** I think it somewhere between \$1000-\$2000, and then every
22 year we spend about \$300-\$400 having it serviced, where
23 they come in and pull out the filters, and they are
24 pretty gross. So I'm thinking, no, they have not
25 improved their water quality.

1 **Q** So your – in answer to Mr. Knowles' question, you think
2 it's still continuing?

3 **A** Yes.

4 **Q** Were you not to have that system, you would still be
5 receiving –

6 **A** Yucky water.

7 **Q** Yes, ma'am.

8 **A** Yes.

9 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Thank you. That's
10 all I have, Mr. Chairman.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.
12 Thank you, Ms. Anthony.

13 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

14 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

15 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Jim Ewers, followed by Rand
16 Ernst and Thomas Wilson. Thomas Wilson on deck.

17 [Witness affirmed]

18 THEREUPON came,

19 **J I M E W E R S ,**

20 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

21 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

22 **WITNESS:** I'm Jim Ewers. I live at 2 Catawba
23 Ridge Court, Lake Wylie.

24 It's been about a couple of years ago, the
25 *Charlotte Observer* wrote an article about the

1 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utility Department. In it, I
2 found their rates were one-half of what Blue
3 Granite charges, and I got to thinking, now, what
4 could possibly be the expenses that would justify
5 something like that?

6 I went on the Internet and I googled Blue
7 Granite, and they are a part of Utilities, Inc.,
8 who is part of Corix, who is privately owned by
9 British Columbia Investment Management Corporation.
10 I'm wondering – we have four levels of ownership.
11 I'm wondering if there's an overhead markup at
12 every level, and I – if there is, I don't think
13 that's correct, and I would hope that you would
14 correct that. Thank you.

15 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, sir.

16 Any questions?

17 [No response]

18 Thank you, very much. Appreciate you being
19 here.

20 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

21 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next up, Rand Ernst, followed by
22 Thomas Wilson and Bryan Weber. Bryan Weber on
23 deck. please.

24 [Witness affirmed]

25 <

1 THEREUPON came,

2 R A N D E R N S T ,

3 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

4 MR. RICHARDSON: State your name, please.

5 WITNESS: Hi, my name is Rand Ernst. I live
6 on Summerside Drive, in Autumn Cove subdivision.
7 We've been living there a little over 10 years.

8 When we moved in 10 years ago, my daughter was
9 just turned four years old. And not long after
10 moving in, we noticed poor water quality, as far as
11 we'd end up with black rings around our toilet;
12 every so often, we'd see black substances coming
13 out of the spigots that she brushes her teeth with.
14 And I called Blue Granite, and they said that the
15 water's just dirty and they just needed to flush
16 the lines because of new construction in the
17 neighborhood. They said they did that; they came
18 and ran the hydrants for a while. Absolutely no
19 change, whatsoever, in the quality of the water.

20 Went ahead and bought a whole-house filtration
21 system for our house, just because of my concern
22 for my daughter and our health. It helped a little
23 bit, but not enough. Whatever it is is fine enough
24 to where it's making it through the higher-end
25 filters at Lowe's. Okay. So that's one issue we

1 have.

2 So looking at the service issues, we have the
3 less-than-clean water. We've lost service on
4 numerous counts; I don't have all the statistics.
5 I really wasn't planning on speaking today, but I
6 thought it was necessary. So we lost service quite
7 often – well, not often but several times. We've
8 had boil issues – water-boiling issues whereas,
9 like everybody else here has testified, really I
10 only got notice once or twice, ever. Facebook has
11 been much, much more reliable than my overprice
12 paid for Granite – Blue Granite, okay?

13 We have low pressure in our water. We have
14 pressure that is so low, we can't use the shower
15 massage because there's not enough pressure to push
16 it, in our shower. Okay? We've gotten double-
17 billed before, which took an extremely long time
18 and many calls to go ahead and fix. Okay?

19 Then, additionally, for the prices that we're
20 paying, we were told when we can wash our car, if
21 we can water our lawns, and the water Gestapo – oh,
22 we're going to be watched – driving around the
23 neighborhood and watching. This is after paying an
24 exorbitant amount of money for this privilege.
25 Okay?

1 So I want to look at this as – or make my plea
2 based on the fact that a cost-versus-services-
3 rendered type relationship. First off, we're in a
4 monopoly situation; we moved here and we had no
5 choice. We have to use their water; we have to use
6 their sewer. Okay? There are supposed to be
7 antimonopoly laws, but it isn't working now. Okay.
8 So we're having this – we've determined, through
9 other people's testimony, that the price we're
10 paying right now is more than twice the area
11 average for water – twice the area average.

12 [3-minute signal]

13 Can I get just a couple more seconds?

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Just a couple more, please,
15 sir.

16 **WITNESS:** Okay. We've determined that they
17 have a 70 percent markup and absolute – very little
18 to no operating or treatment costs for that. Given
19 those numbers, I don't know how they can justify
20 what they're earning now, and they want an
21 increase – not just an increase, but a 50 percent
22 increase. That's absurd.

23 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, sir.

24 Questions?

25 [No response]

1 Thank you, very much. I appreciate you being
2 here.

3 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

4 MR. BOCKMAN: Next up, Thomas Wilson, followed
5 by Bryan Weber and David Roughton.

6 MR. WILSON: Sir, I would like to concede my
7 spot to someone else [indicating]. Am I allowed to
8 do that?

9 MR. RICHARDSON: Did you sign up?

10 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

11 MR. WILSON: Yeah, he's on the list. He's
12 further down. We were comparing notes. I like his
13 notes better than mine.

14 [Laughter]

15 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: That's fine. That's fine,
16 go ahead.

17 [Witness affirmed]

18 THEREUPON came,

19 R A Y W I L L I A M S ,
20 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

21 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name.

22 WITNESS: My name's Ray Williams, and I live
23 on Squirrel Lane, in Lake Wylie.

24 We've heard a lot of facts, saw a lot of
25 emotions, but I've been watching this for 10 years.

1 I've been coming to these meetings every other
2 year, when they ask for a tax increase. And over
3 this time, we've always wondered: Who are these
4 guys? I heard they were a Swedish-owned company a
5 few years ago. And my predecessor actually found
6 who they are, and they're owned by a Canadian
7 company: BCI.

8 What's interesting is to look at BCI's own
9 words about their water companies. And I went to
10 their annual report and I read it in detail,
11 gentlemen. And it's very hard to find. You've
12 done a good job of hiding who you are.

13 BCI, in their annual report, show that their
14 [indicating] parent company, Corix, is one of their
15 focused infrastructure groups. Why is that?
16 Because they make a ton of money.

17 Now, what a good business practice is, is you
18 benchmark; and BCI benchmarks the industry that
19 these guys play in. And what we found, from their
20 own words and their annual report, is that the
21 benchmark that they found for the industry is –
22 what? – 7 percent. What are these guys making?
23 Last year, 9.7 percent, 38 percent above the
24 benchmark that they calculate. Thirty-eight
25 percent. Who, in their right mind, could approve

1 these people to give them an additional penny?
2 Because these are their words, not us who have to
3 live with it.

4 The actual return over the last five years was
5 benchmarked at 7.4 percent for the last five years.
6 They made 10.1 percent and they exceeded the
7 benchmark by 36 percent. The 10-year benchmark was
8 7.7 percent, and they exceeded it over the last 10
9 years.

10 How much, gentlemen? You know what it is.
11 Thirty-seven point seven [37.7] percent. What are
12 we doing here, folks? I don't know.

13 They pay their top five executives almost \$10
14 million. Not a bad profit. Their annual report
15 states that they have a focus on legislation.
16 That's you Commissioners. They focus on you guys
17 to influence you to allow them to make more and
18 more and more profit. That is their words. They
19 focus on you.

20 Your job and your mission statement is to
21 serve the public of South Carolina. Are we doing
22 that? York County – when did York County have the
23 last increase on water, folks? When? 2008.

24 **VOICE:** [Inaudible.]

25 **WITNESS:** '09?

1 **VOICE:** [Shaking head.] 2016.

2 **WITNESS:** '16? Okay. So it's been a few
3 years ago, and I think the County Council is
4 putting in legislation to even extend this no-
5 increase.

6 So why can York County do it, and these guys –

7 [3-minute signal]

8 – can't?

9 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Williams.

10 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Any questions?

12 [No response]

13 Thank you, sir.

14 [Applause]

15 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

16 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next up, Bryan Weber, followed
17 by David Roughton, followed by Allen Vesting.

18 [Witness affirmed]

19 THEREUPON came,

20 **B R Y A N W E B E R ,**

21 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

22 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

23 **WITNESS:** My name is Bryan Weber. I live on
24 Swamp Fox – or, the Foxwood subdivision, on Swamp
25 Fox Drive.

1 A couple of years ago, we had a 30 percent
2 increase. Now they're calling for another 55
3 percent. That sounds like a total of 85 percent,
4 doesn't it? It is not. When you do the math, you
5 discover that, through compounding, it's a total of
6 101.5 percent increase over what we were paying two
7 years ago.

8 **VOICE:** Yep.

9 **WITNESS:** Double. Double. In my profession
10 as a chemical engineer, we have a word for that.
11 That word is "nuts."

12 [Laughter]

13 I won't tell you the word we had for it, back
14 on the farm. Can't use that language here. A
15 hundred and one point five [101.5] percent increase
16 over two years ago.

17 They want you to approve that? We have no
18 choice of anyone else to go to. We can't go to a
19 competitor. We can't drill a well in our front
20 yard or use a septic tank and drain-field system.
21 We're stuck. They have us over a barrel. You are
22 our only hope. Thank you.

23 [Applause]

24 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Weber.

25 Any questions?

[No response]

[WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

MR. BOCKMAN: Up next we have David Roughton, followed by Allen Vesting and John McCallion. Allen Vesting and John McCallion on deck?

[No response]

Do we have any of those names in the building? One more time, David Roughton, Allen Vesting, John McCallion.

[No response]

Ameenah Luqmaan? Celia Broome? Ameenah Luqmaan and Celia Broome, followed by John Michael Vandergriff?

[Witness affirmed]

THEREUPON came,

A M E E N A H L U Q M A A N ,
who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name.

WITNESS: Ameenah Luqmaan. I live in Harpers Mill subdivision.

I recently moved to the Clover area in June of last year. Now, I'm proactive when it comes to finding out utilities, because I'm single. I couldn't get any information on the fact that it was Blue Granite that provided the water.

1 Otherwise, I would've had second thoughts about
2 moving to this area. And after living here for
3 these many months, I am seriously considering
4 moving.

5 Now, I have worked in the healthcare field for
6 over 40 years. I know I don't look it, but I have.

7 [Laughter]

8 I wash my hands a lot, because every now and
9 then in the doctor's office, they don't have any
10 help and they call me. And I'm retired. I'm
11 retired working. But my water bill through Blue
12 Granite is over what I pay for Duke Energy and my
13 gas bill, combined. It's me, myself, and I, and a
14 13-pound poodle.

15 [Laughter]

16 I bathe daily, she doesn't. I drink bottled
17 water and have for years. This is the fifth house,
18 and I hoped the last I would have to buy. But at
19 the rate that I'm going with Blue Granite, I'll
20 have to move again, further south. I left Ohio,
21 I've been in Columbia, I've been to Rock Hill, Fort
22 Mill, and now the lovely neighborhood of Lake
23 Wylie. In all those years, I have never had a
24 water bill over \$35, and I am the oldest of 10 with
25 a lot more family members. With them visiting 13

1 at a time, the water bill was never over \$45. Why
2 am I paying \$106.05? What is – [indicating].
3 Wrong glasses.

4 [Laughter]

5 What is a Safe Drinking Water Act fee? I
6 drink bottled water. I don't drink tap water.
7 Neither does the dog.

8 So, their prices are ridiculous. It's
9 extortion. I'm insulted and assaulted. Both. And
10 to think I'm retired. A lot of us – look around
11 this room. A lot of us are retired. I'm a medical
12 assistant; I'm not an attorney, a doctor. A lot of
13 doctors' offices that I work for, we didn't have a
14 401(k) plan, so I'm living on Social Security. I
15 can't afford a 55 percent increase in my water. If
16 I had somebody else to get my water through, I
17 would. Thank you.

18 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Luqmaan.
19 Any questions?

20 [No response]

21 Thank you, very much.

22 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

23 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Celia Broome,
24 followed by John Michael Vandergriff. Celia
25 Broome, John Michael Vandergriff, with Linda Faile

1 on deck.

2 [Witness affirmed]

3 THEREUPON came,

4 C E L I A B R O O M E ,

5 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

6 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name.

7 WITNESS: My name is Celia Broome. I live at
8 477 Snapdragon Drive, in the Summerset at Autumn
9 Cove neighborhood. We've lived there since
10 September of 2014. However, I was raised in the
11 Lake Wylie area.

12 I just want to go on about the customer
13 service. I wasn't going to come to this meeting.
14 I had planned on it, but then after what has
15 happened this week with Blue Granite, I knew I had
16 to, to come tell what they have done to our
17 neighborhood, and how rude and, just, they hate
18 people.

19 So, in September of 2014, we moved into our
20 house, my husband and I. At the time, my husband
21 had cancer, and we were going through a lot of
22 stuff, so I set myself up on auto-draft because
23 that is one thing I didn't have to worry about. I
24 knew my bills were getting paid.

25 So, approximately March of 2015, our water was

1 cut off. We were told that it was for nonpayment,
2 and I said, "But I'm on auto-draft. How did I get
3 a nonpayment?" And I looked it up, and they had
4 not drafted my account, and they said, "Well you
5 never turned your name in. Like, it's still under
6 the builder's name. You never changed your
7 account." And I was like, "Yes, I did. I have
8 proof," and I had old bills where they had drafted
9 my account and I could show them my bank account
10 where they've taken money out.

11 Well, Blue Granite had decided to – well, they
12 were Utilities, Inc. at the time – decided to just
13 delete my account, and said that I moved down the
14 road and that that's where – they wanted the people
15 who hadn't done it, and so they just decided to cut
16 my water off and let them have water and me pay
17 their bills, whereas I didn't have any. And, of
18 course, later that evening, they came and turned my
19 water on, after threatening a \$75 cut-off fee – or,
20 a turn-back-on fee, when I had done absolutely
21 nothing wrong.

22 Now, we got all that fixed, back on auto-
23 draft. Last year, I open a credit card that earned
24 points if I paid. So I said "Hey, why don't I put
25 my bills on this, earn some points?" Well, of

1 course, in December of 2019, my account number was
2 stolen and I had to change everything back to an
3 auto-draft. And I did. I logged onto my
4 Utilities, Inc., changed it back to my bank account
5 that was still saved on there, and went about my
6 day, saying, "Everything's good." Flash forward to
7 February 17, 2020. I leave my door to go to work,
8 I have an orange tag hanging on my doorknob to tell
9 me they had come and cut my water off for
10 nonpayment. And I couldn't understand why, and so
11 I called them. And they said, "Well, you never –
12 you never paid your account." I'm like, "Yes, I
13 did. I changed it to my bank account. What
14 happened?" And she was like, "Oh. Well, something
15 went wrong." I was like, "Well, let me give it to
16 you. I want to pay my bill." I don't want to be –
17 I don't want to neglect this. It's a bill. So I
18 changed it. I gave the lady my information. She
19 took my bank account information and she said,
20 "Yes, this bank account has been used on this
21 account before," and I said, "Yes, I've used it in
22 the past. It's what I want to use."

23 [3-minute signal]

24 I just have a little more. And she said,
25 "You're good." She gave me a number, I called, had

1 my water cut back on. I have the bill where it
2 says I paid that.

3 Last weekend, my dad's best friend died. We
4 drove him to Savannah, Georgia, to the funeral. We
5 had to check out of the hotel at 11 a.m., go to the
6 funeral at 2 p.m. It was 70 degrees in Savannah
7 Monday. We were sweating and walking all around
8 the city. We drive back to our house in Lake
9 Wylie, get there about 8:30 at night on Monday,
10 March 2nd. Oh, well, there's another orange tag on
11 our door. Our water's been cut off for nonpayment,
12 because they said that I never paid them, that I –
13 oh, I paid it that night, for the bill that I have
14 [indicating]. You all can have a copy of it. It
15 says that I owe \$141 and it shows that I paid \$303
16 on February – it says it went through on the 19th,
17 but it was the 17th. And so I paid that online to
18 see if I could get my bill turned back on.

19 They didn't come. The next morning I called
20 and said, "Hey, I need water. I have a toddler
21 and I have to go to work." And they said, "Well,
22 you still owe \$300." And I said, "Why? I paid
23 this." And they said, "No, you didn't. You don't
24 have enough money in your bank account and so you
25 overdrafted." I said, "There is no way that I

1 overdrafted. I know for a fact that I had the
2 money in that account to pay it." She said, "No,
3 you didn't. You need to call your bank." So I
4 paid them \$200 and I said, "Please, come turn my
5 water off - on. I need to take a shower. I need
6 to wash my kid," and they said, "We'll get there
7 when we get there."

8 I called my bank. The person at the bank
9 actually laughed at me and said, "They told you you
10 did not have enough money in your account?" And I
11 said, "Yes, they did." They said, "Well, if they
12 would've - if she would've actually billed us, we
13 would've paid the bill, but we received nothing
14 from Blue Granite requesting payment."

15 And so I called again and told them that, and
16 they said, "Well we can't help if you don't have
17 your money in your account." So I ended up
18 paying - this has a little - \$343.16 on that day,
19 for nothing, and I have two \$40 reconnect fees, for
20 nothing. It was not in my hands. I cannot fix
21 their billing system. I have the money; I told
22 them how to get it. What else am I supposed to do?
23 Am I supposed to actually take it out and hand it
24 to someone there? How many people use a card or
25 auto-draft to pay their accounts? And on the bill,

1 which I want you all to have, it shows that it's an
2 auto-draft, and it shows that I should only owe
3 \$141.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Broome.
5 Any questions?

6 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

7 **BY MR. WELLBORN:**

8 **Q** I'm sorry to hear about your situation. Adam James, the
9 Director of Operations for the company, is in the
10 hallway here. It sounds like an evolving sort of
11 ongoing situation, and he'd be happy to address these
12 issues.

13 **A** Oh. And I also found out, when this happened – I asked
14 on Facebook, our community, and I was the fourth house
15 that had their water cut off that day, that all had a
16 bill that said it was due on the 16th of March.

17 **Q** It sounds like maybe some kind of system issue that day.
18 The company will look into it, Ms. Broome.

19 [Laughter]

20 **A** I think – like, is water not like a necessity?

21 **MR. WELLBORN:** No further questions, Mr.
22 Chairman.

23 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

24 Any other questions? Mr. Knowles.

25 <

CROSS EXAMINATION**BY MR. KNOWLES:**

Q Ms. Broome, did you receive notice prior to your water being cut off on March 2nd or when it was cut off last year?

A No.

MR. KNOWLES: No? Yes, ma'am. Okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you.

Other questions? Commissioner Ervin.

COMMISSIONER ERVIN: Can we put your bill in evidence?

WITNESS: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER ERVIN: Would you give it to him, so we can mark it for identification?

WITNESS: And it has the dates and stuff.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: We need to make sure it's redacted – that you redact the information you don't want on there.

WITNESS: It's just my account number. I mean, if you want to pay my bill, go for it.

[Laughter]

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Okay. We'll mark that for identification as No. 45.

Thank you, ma'am.

1 [WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 45 was
2 marked for identification, with receipt
3 into evidence to be later ruled upon]

4 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

5 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have John Michael
6 Vandergriff, Linda Faile, and Brian Luckadoo. John
7 Michael Vandergriff, Linda Faile, and Brian
8 Luckadoo to the front, please?

9 [Witness affirmed]

10 THEREUPON came,

11 **J O H N M I C H A E L V A N D E R G R I F F ,**
12 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

13 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

14 **WITNESS:** Hello. My name's John Michael
15 Vandergriff. I'm a Fort Mill resident; I live on
16 Redcoat Drive. I've lived there for 12 years in
17 the Foxwood subdivision. I'm on Blue Granite water
18 and sewer; I have been the entire time.

19 When I first moved in, I was shocked to
20 receive – to realize how high the bill was, just as
21 a single person, that was, I believe, upwards of
22 \$70. Now, with a family of four, my last water
23 bill was \$167. From what I can calculate, the best
24 I can figure out online from the rates that these
25 other utilities give, my comparable water bill

1 would be approximately six hundred – I’m sorry –
2 would be approximately \$60 in the City of Rock
3 Hill. Comparable Fort Mill, outside the city
4 limits, would be approximately \$85.

5 My current base rate before I use a single
6 drop of water is \$96, and I’m being charged \$11.85
7 per thousand gallons of use. If their rate is
8 approved, my new base rate, before I use a single
9 drop of water, would be \$142.

10 Also, something that we’ve dealt with, we’ve
11 had lead in our drinking water on and off for the
12 last few years. The water company claims that it
13 must be our piping or fixtures, but, to me, it
14 would stand to reason that it would be consistently
15 in our water if it were our piping and fixtures.
16 It appears to me that the variability comes from
17 the water company’s inability to put the correct
18 amount of corrosion inhibitors in the water that
19 they sell to us.

20 I feel like our water rates lower our property
21 value. The monthly difference between our water
22 bills and a normal water bill would be around the
23 same as adding \$20,000 to a 30-year mortgage. If
24 their rate – just if this rate increase is
25 approved, it would be approximately the same as

1 adding another \$30,000 to the cost of a 30-year
2 mortgage. Any buyer that's paying attention could
3 easily use this to negotiate a lower price via a
4 comparable home that has a normal water supply, and
5 I would personally avoid buying any home, in the
6 future, that's served by Blue Granite, just because
7 of the negative experiences that we've had and the
8 outrageous cost.

9 I've read the docketed testimony that's
10 attached to this by Morgan K. Lafayette, Jr., and I
11 find it egregious that Blue Granite has asked for a
12 rate increase based on costs that they haven't even
13 incurred yet. It also appears that Blue Granite
14 cannot competently use the appropriate earnings
15 model and pricing model, based on what this lady
16 has said.

17 In short, I find our water rates to be
18 exorbitant and I feel like it further increases
19 damage to our property value. It stretches the
20 budgets of some residents. And it's already far
21 higher – at least double or triple – to any
22 comparable local areas that are served by public
23 utilities.

24 That's all I had. Thank you for taking the
25 time to listen.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr.
2 Vandergriff.

3 Any questions? Ms. Dover.

4 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

5 **BY MS. DOVER:**

6 **Q** You mentioned lead in your water, over a few years?

7 **A** Yes, ma'am.

8 **Q** Did the company ever come out and look into that?

9 **A** They've tested our water. I believe we're on an annual
10 testing frequency. I want to say, three years ago we
11 had lead; two years ago, we didn't; this year, we did.
12 Our lead is approximately .005 ppm. The EPA action
13 level is three times that; it's .015 ppm. So we're at
14 about 33 percent of the action level where they would
15 have to do something. When we had it previously, we
16 switched completely to bottled drinking water until, I
17 believe, about a whole year went by, and then we got a
18 positive test that said no lead in the water. And then
19 another, you know, year went by where we were drinking
20 the water, and now we've got another positive – or,
21 we've got another positive test where there is lead in
22 the water. So we're faced with do we install like a
23 reverse-osmosis unit? Do we go back to bottled drinking
24 water? Or what do we do now?

25 **MS. DOVER:** Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Any other questions?

2 [No response]

3 Thank you, sir.

4 **WITNESS:** Thank you for your time.

5 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

6 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next up, Linda Faile, Brian
7 Luckadoo, Kelly Dela Cruz, Nico Dela Cruz. Brian
8 Luckadoo, Kelly Dela Cruz, or Nico Dela Cruz?

9 [Witness affirmed]

10 THEREUPON came,

11 **B R I A N L U C K A D O O ,**

12 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

13 **MR. RICHARDSON:** State your name for the
14 record.

15 **WITNESS:** Brian Luckadoo. Good evening. I
16 just want to say thank you for the attention and
17 listening to everyone. I think that's a great
18 thing, but usually government – we always complain
19 about it, but this is an opportunity to speak to
20 you guys on something that really matters.

21 We have, I guess, analog water meters, and
22 they have recently switched them out, and I live in
23 Autumn Falls townhome community. They switched out
24 the analog meters to a digital one. We had a water
25 bill come in; I think I had thirty-six, thirty-one

1 thousand gallon water bill. And I have a family of
2 four; usually about 4000-5000 is average.

3 Called them out. It took about three calls to
4 finally get somebody to come out, and he came out
5 and said I had a leak. I said, "Well, my water's
6 off. Let me go make sure." I went outside and
7 he's checking my neighbor's meter, so I said,
8 "That's not my meter. It's right here in front of
9 my house." And he kept looking and, you know, it
10 took a little convincing, but finally he realized,
11 yes, the meter number was wrong. So, apparently,
12 when they took the analog meter off, they gave the
13 final reading of my neighbor's on mine.

14 Long story short, my neighbor has a meter
15 number that doesn't even exist, on his bill. He's
16 tried to call several times and no callbacks, no
17 anything. I had the help of Allison, here, on my
18 behalf; she's been calling. I have called several
19 times, maybe up to six times trying to get somebody
20 to help me. Reassured me. They're actually quite
21 nice on the phone, very reassuring, but to no
22 avail. The guy came out three more times to test.
23 I've got cameras and everything else, so – he's
24 still checking the neighbor's meter. He's still
25 not convinced. And he – but – long story short, it

1 finally got resolved today, coincidentally. That's
2 been four months of waiting. My bill was as high
3 as \$530. I made two good-faith payments of \$130,
4 each, so the last bill I got was over \$400. And,
5 again, 4000 gallons is about my average. This has
6 not been the first time I've had 10,000-12,000
7 gallon usage, and they will come back on the next
8 month and it's 500 gallons. So you can see that on
9 the bill I have, as well, which I'm going to turn
10 over to you guys.

11 Interesting thing is, the neighbor had a
12 mishap, no ID on the meter number. My meter number
13 is 207; it still had 210, which is his meter
14 number. And then I checked my other neighbor,
15 which was in hospice at the time; she recently
16 passed. But –

17 [3-minute signal]

18 Sorry. But as soon as we lifted the cover
19 off, there's water spraying everywhere. Lord only
20 knows how long that's been leaking. So, that's it.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Luckadoo.
22 Do you want – do you want to enter that, your bill,
23 in?

24 **WITNESS:** Right.

25 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** All right. We're going to

1 need to make sure you redact your personal
2 information, your account number. And it will be
3 marked as Exhibit No. 46.

4 Any questions of Mr. Luckadoo?

5 **MR. WELLBORN:** Just real quick –

6 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Mr. Wellborn.

7 **MR. WELLBORN:** – Mr. Chairman.

8 It sounded like some of the issues were
9 resolved, but there may be some outstanding issues?
10 I would ask that you speak with Mr. Adam James out
11 in the hallway, just to make sure we tie that
12 loose – any loose ends up.

13 **WITNESS:** Okay.

14 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

16 Any other questions?

17 **MR. KNOWLES:** Mr. Luckadoo, Ryder Thompson
18 from ORS may try to speak to you, as well.

19 **WITNESS:** Okay. Thank you.

20 **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay. Thank you.

22 Commissioners, any questions?

23 [No response]

24 Thank you, Mr. Luckadoo.

25 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

1 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

2 [WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 46 was
3 marked for identification, with receipt
4 into evidence to be later ruled upon]

5 MR. BOCKMAN: Next we have Kelly Dela Cruz,
6 Niko Dela Cruz, Alicia Byers up next. Alicia
7 Byers.

8 [Witness affirmed]

9 THEREUPON came,

10 K E L L Y D E L A C R U Z ,
11 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

12 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name for
13 the record.

14 WITNESS: My name is Kelly Dela Cruz. I live
15 on Redcoat Drive, in the Foxwood neighborhood.

16 Tonight's my daughter's first birthday. This
17 isn't an ideal birthday activity, but I felt that I
18 couldn't afford to not be here. We're facing an
19 over 50 percent rate increase proposed; that would
20 be about \$50 a month for us. This would total \$600
21 a year. And just as an illustration, if I took
22 that money, put it in a 521 educational savings
23 account for my daughter, assuming an 8 percent
24 average rate of return, I would have \$22,000 when
25 she's 18 years old.

1 Per their own website, Blue Granite's reason
2 for increasing their rates is to continue providing
3 reliable and high-quality water services. I have
4 some issues with their definition of "reliable and
5 high-quality."

6 From 1993, this company – from 1993 to 2013,
7 excuse me, this company had more enforcement orders
8 than any other company in the State of South
9 Carolina. These were enforcement orders against
10 water and sewage system violations. For the past
11 25 years, they've had more drinking-water
12 violations than any other water provider in the
13 State. So I'm not sure what reliable and high-
14 quality services we're expecting to pay for.

15 According to *The State Newspaper*, Blue Granite
16 is seeking an additional \$11.7 million in added
17 revenue, partially to cover their legal expenses.
18 As recently as 2009 – excuse me – September 2019,
19 just before they filed this rate case, they were
20 cited by DHEC for improper waste disposal. This is
21 a clear example of how they commit these
22 violations, turn around and increase the rates, and
23 put the burden back on us, the consumers.

24 The Public Service Commission is meant to
25 serve the public citizens, like us, and to provide

1 effective regulation of utilities. We are asking,
2 will the Commission work to protect the consumers
3 and the most vulnerable among us? The average
4 cost-of-living increase over the past five years
5 for citizens on Social Security was 1.6 percent.
6 And unchecked increasing of rates, like Blue
7 Granite is proposing, 50 percent, is not
8 sustainable, especially for citizens with a fixed
9 income.

10 To quote from Blue Granite's own website,
11 there is simply no substitute for water. As
12 consumers, we don't have a choice. Right now, our
13 water comes from Blue Granite and we are at their
14 mercy. That is why we need the Public Service
15 Commission's help. So the question comes down to
16 this: Who will the Public Service Commission
17 protect? Blue Granite, a private entity with a
18 record-breaking number of violations who's
19 attempted to price-gouge and offload the cost of
20 their mismanagement onto customers? Or the public,
21 the 28,000 unwilling customers of this company that
22 include the hard-working citizens of the State of
23 South Carolina who could be using these funds to
24 boost the economy or save for their children's
25 education, rather than being expected to shoulder

1 the cost of Blue Granite's ineptitude?

2 Thank you.

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Dela Cruz.

4 Any questions? Commissioner Ervin.

5 **EXAMINATION**

6 **BY COMMISSIONER ERVIN:**

7 **Q** Ms. Dela Cruz, tell me where did you find the number of
8 violations you referred to?

9 **A** There's two articles that were in *The State Newspaper*.
10 The first one was published in November 2019; that's the
11 one that said from 1993 to 2013 they had more
12 enforcement orders than any other company in South
13 Carolina – so that's not just water companies; it's any
14 company or government agency. And then the second
15 article – and I have both here, if you need them – was
16 from March 2019, and it said over the past 25 years
17 they've had more drinking-water violations than any
18 other water provider in the State.

19 **Q** Would you mark those, so we get them in our record,
20 please?

21 **A** Uh-huh.

22 **COMMISSIONER ERVIN:** Thank you.

23 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** We'll mark those as No. 47.

24 Thank you, Ms. Dela Cruz.

25 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

[WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 47 was
marked for identification, with receipt
into evidence to be later ruled upon]

MR. BOCKMAN: Next we have Niko Dela Cruz,
Alecia Byers, and J. Maxwell. Alicia Byers and J.
Maxwell, to the front, please.

[Witness affirmed]

THEREUPON came,

N I K O D E L A C R U Z ,

who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

MR. RICHARDSON: State your name, please.

WITNESS: My name is Niko Dela Cruz. That's
my wife, Kelly Dela Cruz, and our daughter. First,
I'd just like to say I hope you don't feel too bad
about our daughter being here; it's a good early
lesson about civic duty, so...

I'd first like to thank the Public Service
Commission for hearing our concerns today. My wife
and I live in the Foxwood neighborhood, in Fort
Mill.

Here, I have a water bill of a friend who
lives just five miles away from our neighborhood in
Fort Mill, outside of city limits, like Foxwood.
Their water and sewer services are provided by York
County. Their monthly total for both water and

1 sewer amounts to \$90.54 for 6200 gallons. Compare
2 that to our bill from the same month from Blue
3 Granite at \$151.06 for 4650 dollars – or, gallons.

4 The proposed 50 percent increase would easily
5 put us above \$200 for the month, essentially making
6 us pay 100 percent more for almost one-third less
7 water than neighborhoods just five miles away in
8 the same town.

9 So what could possibly be the cause of this
10 drastic increase? Blue Granite states on their
11 website – and this is public information – that
12 the, quote, “proposed rate increase is intended to
13 generate adequate revenue to keep the system in
14 compliance with federal and State regulations, as
15 well as to recover investment already spent by the
16 company since the end of the last rate case.”

17 It’s not a secret that Blue Granite has a
18 troubled history keeping compliant with federal and
19 State regulations – regulations with which other
20 providers of water, like York County Water and
21 Sewer, do not seem to have issues, as they have not
22 intended to raise their customers’ rates to nearly
23 the same degree as ours. It is unethical for the
24 28,000 customers of Blue Granite’s services to pay
25 for the ineptitude of its water provider.

1 In any other scenario where a private business
2 raises its customers' rates to compensate for its
3 own negligence, it would not be unheard of for the
4 customers to simply take their business elsewhere.
5 We, however, do not have that luxury. We are at
6 complete mercy to the whims of Blue Granite, a
7 company who is treating its customers like its own
8 personal bailout. We are the passengers of a
9 sinking ship and the Public Service Commission is
10 our one and only hope. We implore that the PSC
11 help protect their fellow South Carolinians from
12 the predatory business practices that will
13 undoubtedly continue to escalate in the future, if
14 gone unchecked. Thank you.

15 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Dela Cruz.

16 Any questions?

17 [No response]

18 Thank you very much for being here.

19 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

20 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

21 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Alicia Byers, J. Maxwell, Connie
22 Knowlton. Alicia Byers, J. Maxwell, Connie
23 Knowlton?

24 **MS. KNOWLTON:** [Indicating.]

25 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Following Connie Knowlton, we

1 have Calvin Ma and Erilea Ma_[sic]?

2 [Witness affirmed]

3 THEREUPON came,

4 C O N N I E K N O W L T O N ,

5 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

6 MR. RICHARDSON: Please state your name.

7 WITNESS: My name is Connie Knowlton. I live
8 at 306 Brookside, in the famous Foxwood
9 subdivision.

10 Listening to all of these testimonies has made
11 me think of the children's book *If You Give a Mouse*
12 *a Cookie*.

13 [Laughter]

14 And I feel like that is exactly what has
15 happened with Blue Granite. They ask, they get it,
16 they want something else. They want more. And
17 we're not getting – as customers, we're not getting
18 any benefit from that. All we're doing is paying,
19 over and over and over.

20 The company is asking for a 50 percent
21 increase. Wouldn't we all like to get a 50 percent
22 wage increase. If we got that, we wouldn't
23 complain so much. But it's not sustainable to have
24 a 50 percent increase when you have no increase in
25 your income. And I don't feel as though Blue

1 Granite really cares. I walk the neighborhood
2 daily, and I see their truck when we call to say
3 there's a problem, but you don't see any proactive
4 maintenance being done.

5 Thank you, and I just pray God will give you
6 wisdom.

7 [Laughter]

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Knowlton.

9 Any questions? Yes.

10 **MR. KNOWLTON:** Just kidding. I promised her I
11 wouldn't cross-examine.

12 [Laughter]

13 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Good thing. You've got to
14 go home tonight, don't you?

15 [Laughter]

16 Okay. Commissioners.

17 [No response]

18 Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Knowlton.

19 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

20 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Calvin Ma, followed by Erilea^[sic]
21 Ma, followed by Doug Chandler.

22 [Witness affirmed]

23 THEREUPON came,

24 **C A L V I N M A ,**

25 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

1 **MR. RICHARDSON:** State your name, please.

2 **WITNESS:** My name is Calvin Ma. I live on
3 Brookside Drive in Foxwood.

4 And I just want to thank the time for the
5 Commissioners to come tonight to a long meeting.
6 I'm going to skip all this, actually, because what
7 I'm going to share, it's something we're all
8 interested.

9 Was it two years ago they had a 30 percent
10 increase of their water rates? We all – you pay
11 that. And now I'm actually at retirement age; I'm
12 looking forward to Social Security. And this, I
13 just learned – some of us already testify you only
14 get 1.6 percent increase this year. Let's round it
15 up to 2 percent. And so, for those who will be
16 looking forward to fixed income, 30 percent would
17 take 15 years to get to, right? Two percent a
18 year? So we should only be having this meeting 13
19 years from now –

20 [Laughter]

21 – for that increase in rates. Yeah, yeah.
22 Okay. So you follow my thinking, because I will be
23 in that bracket. Fifty percent is a quite steep
24 increase.

25 Otherwise, I've lived in the neighborhood for

1 14 years. The house was built in 1980, which only
2 means those pipes in the ground has been at least
3 there 40 years. It's time to change. And I hear a
4 lot of my neighbors saying roots are in the pipes.
5 It needs new infrastructure. And maybe the
6 representative of Blue Granite could consider maybe
7 it's cheaper just to replace the old pipes, and
8 then we won't have these meetings every year or
9 two.

10 And, let's see, what other things? Got way
11 more. That's okay. That's all I need to say.

12 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Ma.

13 **WITNESS:** Thank you for your time.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, very much.
15 Questions.

16 [No response]

17 Thank you very much for being here.

18 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

19 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Erilea^[sic] Ma, Doug Chandler,
20 Walter Wise. Walter Wise on deck.

21 [Witness affirmed]

22 THEREUPON came,

23 **E R I K A M A ,**

24 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

25 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

1 **WITNESS:** My name is Erika Ma, and I've been
2 living in the Foxwood neighborhood for 14 years.

3 We are probably – we have the house the
4 closest to the retaining pond, so we know what it
5 means to have smells, and bad smells. We had – in
6 2009, we had an exchange student who told us, even
7 in his country where there's a lot of pollution, he
8 never had that.

9 So we did call the company and they did come,
10 in 2009, with two big trucks to cistern and they
11 emptied. It was overflowed.

12 A few years later, I was along the creek
13 behind our house and I noticed the water was going
14 the wrong way. So, I call them and said, "Maybe
15 you should come and see, but the water of the creek
16 is going in a hole. Could you see? It's changing
17 its course. It disappears. Can you come?" Well,
18 it was the sewage pipe that was broken. So they
19 came, they take it out, they repaired. But they
20 left everything there on our property. You can
21 still come.

22 A few – I think it was two years ago, 2018 –
23 two years ago, I noticed water running on the road
24 in front of our house. I let it go for a few days
25 and I thought, "Well, surely somebody should

1 notice, should say something." Well, nobody said,
2 so I called them and I said, "Maybe you should see
3 there is water on our street, running." So they
4 came, and they repaired.

5 If the neighborhood would not care, they would
6 never care. If they lose water, it's their own
7 fault. They don't care. I've been there 14 years,
8 and I haven't seen them doing any improvement. But
9 they know how to take our money. That's all I have
10 to say.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, ma'am.

12 Any questions? Mr. Kendree?

13 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

14 **BY MR. KENDREE:**

15 **Q** Thank you, ma'am. What was left on your property that
16 we can come see?

17 **A** Sorry?

18 **Q** You said there was – they left things on your property.

19 **A** Yes. So, when they came to change the sewage pipe that
20 was broken in the creek on our property, they just moved
21 everything away. And because it's also an easement,
22 they just leave it there. The easement is on our
23 property. So I still have a nice decorated orange
24 ceramic pipe in the back there, and we did move the big
25 cement blocks –

1 **Q** Thank you.

2 **A** – with the help of some neighbors.

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

4 Commissioners.

5 [No response]

6 Thank you, Ms. Ma.

7 Before we – before we start, we need to take a
8 10-minute break. Well, I need to take a 10-minute
9 break.

10 [Laughter]

11 [WHEREUPON, a recess was taken from 9:30
12 to 9:35 p.m.]

13 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you. We'll call the
14 hearing back to order and ask Mr. Bockman to read
15 the name of the next witness.

16 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Up next we have Doug Chandler,
17 followed by Walter Wise and Sara Strickland. Doug
18 Chandler, Walter Wise, Sara Strickland.

19 [Witness affirmed]

20 THEREUPON came,

21 **D O U G L A S C H A N D L E R ,**

22 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

23 **MR. RICHARDSON:** State your name, please.

24 **WITNESS:** Hi, my name is Douglas Chandler. I
25 live on 307 Swamp Fox Drive, the Foxwood

neighborhood.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Let's get you a little closer to that microphone.

WITNESS: Sorry about that.

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Yeah.

WITNESS: I'm Doug Chandler, 307 Swamp Fox Drive, in Foxwood.

I recently moved up here from Miami, Florida, and I'm here on behalf of my girlfriend and I, but she's actually working late, so – to make up some extra hours, so we can stay afloat on bills.

Anyway, when I noticed our water bills were pretty high, I asked her about it and she mentioned that Blue Granite likes to have their rates really high for us. So, anyways, we're just two young people trying to make it, and we work a lot, and we've just come to ask you guys about thinking of us people, you know? Blue Granite sounds like they have a lot of problems, and hopefully they can figure them out, but – that's about all I can say is that we're just here to have a stand for this, so...

CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, Mr. Chandler.

Any questions of Mr. Chandler?

[No response]

1 Thank you for being here.

2 **WITNESS:** Yes.

3 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

4 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Walter Wise,
5 followed by Sara Strickland and Homer Buffington,
6 Jr. Walter Wise, Sara Strickland, and Home
7 Buffington, Jr.

8 [Witness affirmed]

9 THEREUPON came,

10 **W A L T E R W I S E ,**
11 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

12 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

13 **WITNESS:** My name is Walter Wise. I live in
14 Foxwood subdivision, on Foxwood Drive, which is one
15 of the first streets built in our subdivision, I
16 understand, back in 1974, '75. So I've lived there
17 since 1999, and I understand from talking with the
18 neighbors that I've gotten to know, a few of them
19 that have been there longer than me, even, that the
20 infrastructure's still the same as it was when it
21 was built, when that subdivision was put in, which
22 was composed of clay pipes and had eight-foot
23 junctions on it. So, obviously, over these –
24 what? – 50 years or whatever from '74 is, it's got
25 roots that's growing in it, and that's the first

1 problem I ran into when I moved there, that the
2 roots were growing into the main drain – or water –
3 drain line, going out of my house. I won't get
4 into the water situation that everybody's talked
5 about already, but mine is with the infrastructure
6 system with the drainage.

7 So I paid a contractor to come out, replaced
8 all the water lines, drain lines, from my house.
9 Before, I had already replaced everything under my
10 house with all new PVC pipe. There's nothing in
11 there that was originally in that house, not one
12 inch of it. Then I had a contractor replace the
13 drain line from my cutoff at the drain pipe outside
14 my front, out to the street line, which is far as I
15 could go. And so they did that. No problem from
16 where it was backing up under one of my trees.

17 What's it do? It starts backing up again
18 beyond where I put another cleanout. That's up
19 under the street where they cleaned it out. It
20 needed to be cleaned out. So, sure enough, I had a
21 problem – this was two years ago. They came out,
22 before Bluewater got it – or, Blue Granite, excuse
23 me. The other company had it. They came out,
24 cleaned the drain out. And I said, "Okay, it's got
25 that clay pipe out there," and they said, "Well,

1 it's whatever was here originally." "Is that the
2 problem? You going to replace it?" "No, we're not
3 prepared to do that yet." "How you gonna keep that
4 from draining out?" "Well, we're going to have
5 somebody come out and check it every so often. If
6 it needs it, we'll clean it out."

7 So that's been going on now for two years, and
8 I've seen the contractor come out and do it about
9 three times, out in the street. He actually gets
10 to my last cleanout that I put in on my property,
11 goes through that up to the street with a snake.
12 That's all he does. And I said, "Okay, well, you
13 going to replace that out there?" "No, they tell
14 us it's too expensive to do that."

15 Okay, so at the end of all this talk, my point
16 is, my job that I retired was I worked in corporate
17 finance and I remember working with fixed assets.
18 How do you determine when you invest in that, what
19 do you do to get your money's worth out of that.
20 Primarily, it was maintenance and upgrades over the
21 years. Nothing has an indefinite lifetime.

22 So I want to know, after this 50-year-old
23 water – drain system under the subdivision, now
24 that you own the water company, are you going to do
25 anything about it, or is the fact that our little

1 water system out there in Foxwood is just a drop in
2 the bucket compared to all the other 28,000 people
3 you have, or whatever they quoted, in the country
4 with the conglomerate that you are? Are you going
5 to –

6 [3-minute signal]

7 – ever come back and invest in our
8 neighborhood? I've not seen any evidence
9 whatsoever of that. They did put new water meters
10 in my yard, about six months ago, but nobody else.
11 I don't know why, but they just did it. But,
12 otherwise, I want to see some structure –
13 infrastructure improvements made. Thank you.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Wise.

15 Any questions? Mr. Knowlton.

16 **CROSS EXAMINATION**

17 **BY MR. KNOWLTON:**

18 **Q** Mr. Wise, I heard you say, I believe, that they replaced
19 your water meter.

20 **A** Right.

21 **Q** And you don't know why.

22 **A** No. They just showed up out there one day with a
23 backhoe and dug a hole in my hard, replaced mine and my
24 neighbor right to the right of me, but nobody else on
25 the street got replaced.

1 **Q** Have you noticed a difference in your bills since then?

2 **A** No. The bill is what they're charging us for. The
3 water usage is pretty much the same. I had a couple of
4 months where I used a little extra water, and it showed
5 up. But as far as the water side of my system, I'm
6 satisfied with it since they went to York County – other
7 than the rates for it. The rate for the water I think
8 is too high, based on what everybody else's been saying.
9 But as far as the water coming in, since we went to the
10 York County water, that solved that issue, but the
11 problem is the infrastructure that brings the water to
12 my house and takes it away is 50 years old. And when
13 are you going to do something to upgrade it, is my
14 question.

15 **MR. KNOWLTON:** Thank you, Mr. Wise.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Wise.

17 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

18 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Sara Strickland,
19 followed by Homer Buffington, Jr., and Allison
20 Love. Sara Strickland, Homer Buffington, Jr., and
21 Allison Love.

22 [Witness affirmed]

23 THEREUPON came,

24 **S A R A S T R I C K L A N D ,**

25 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

1 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

2 **WITNESS:** My name is a Sara Strickland. I
3 live at 117 Autumn Falls Drive, in Autumn Cove
4 Townhomes. I'm also on the board of the HOA, but
5 I'm not representing them; I'm just here on behalf
6 of myself.

7 Our wastewater fee was raised 18 percent in
8 2018 to \$65.77. The 55 percent increase being
9 proposed would bring the fee to \$101.94 a month.
10 This would almost double what the fee was prior to
11 the increase in 2018.

12 Has York County raised the fee they charge
13 Blue Granite twice in the last 18 months? No.

14 Is York County charging 45 percent more for
15 water Blue Granite purchases? No.

16 My understanding – and I admit this may not be
17 the case – is that they're requesting the rate hike
18 in order to build more infrastructure to keep up
19 with the growth in York County/Lake Wylie. Why
20 should current customers pay to expand Blue
21 Granite's business? I doubt that, when they have
22 the additional revenue from the new business, that
23 they will pay us back or even lower our rates. If
24 the county were to expand the service, they could
25 issue bonds and we would ultimately get our money

1 back plus some interest. And I know that in an
2 HOA, not only will our individual homeowners have
3 to pay the increase but we've had to raise our HOA
4 fees to cover the increase in our water expense for
5 irrigation.

6 So, needless to say, I'm totally opposed to
7 this rate increase. As far as I can see, there's
8 no justification. We're already paying sometimes
9 two to three times more than any area around us not
10 being serviced by Blue Granite. I moved here from
11 California, a desert state. I'm paying three times
12 what I paid there, and they had to haul the water
13 in from hundreds of miles away to service us. So
14 this is outrageous. Thank you.

15 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Strickland.

16 Any questions?

17 [No response]

18 Thank you very much for being here.

19 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

20 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Homer Buffington and Allison
21 Love. Homer Buffington and Allison Love.

22 [Witness sworn/affirmed]

23 THEREUPON came,

24 **H O M E R B U F F I N G T O N , J R . ,**
25 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

1 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

2 **WITNESS:** Hello. My name is Homer Buffington,
3 Jr., and I represent my wife, Stephanie, and 13-
4 year-old adopted special-needs son, Jessie Lee
5 Buffington.

6 I would like to read a lot of mine, just to
7 stay on track, and I know we have a time limit.
8 First of all, I want to thank each of you for
9 listening to all of the voices here, allowing us to
10 express our great concerns.

11 We've lived at 332 Swamp Fox Drive, in
12 Foxwood, since July of 2016, where our water/sewer
13 bill was \$102.25. This past month of February
14 2020, it was \$188.86. That is an increase of
15 \$86.61.

16 I brought a family portrait today, to put my
17 family and faces on the need today. This is my
18 special-needs son, Jessie Lee, that I want to speak
19 of just a little bit. First of all, I want to talk
20 about, real briefly, the quality of water is so
21 poor that we have, ever since we moved here, we've
22 done bottled water. We buy our own ice, because
23 the smell of chlorine is so intense. And we only –
24 we only bathe, we only wash our clothes. So with –
25 as I stated earlier, our 13-year-old special-needs

son, with special needs there's many times where they have bladder control issues. So if you can only imagine, sometimes up to five times a week you're stripping beds, you are taking mattress covers off, you're taking sheets off, comforters, extra washing. You're having to have extra bathing for special needs. Not only do we look at special needs, we look at senior citizens that are in our subdivisions, that may have bladder issues that require extra washing. There is some young families in Foxwood and these other divisions that have children that need extra water, and it's just very unfair to have to – because of the very nature of the different family units and structure, have to take on that extra expense.

Real quickly, I did just want to say that my wife and I, as many of the others that have mentioned here today, have already started the conversation of is it really worth it to stay in this area, or should we – we lived most of our 21 years of marriage in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and we are potentially looking at –

[3-minute signal]

– selling our home and moving either back to Rock Hill or in a surrounding area.

1 And I thank you for your time today.

2 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Buffington.

3 Any questions of Mr. Buffington?

4 [No response]

5 Thank you very much for being here tonight.

6 **WITNESS:** Thank you.

7 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

8 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Finally, we've got Allison Love
9 on our list. Allison Love?

10 [Witness affirmed]

11 THEREUPON came,

12 **A L L I S O N L O V E ,**

13 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

14 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Please state your name.

15 **WITNESS:** Allison Love.

16 [Brief pause]

17 Public Service Commissioners, welcome to York
18 County. Appreciate you coming tonight, and hope
19 you like our council chambers here, our new
20 building that we're very proud of. Welcome to my
21 world, in more ways than one tonight.

22 My name is Allison Love and, as you may
23 remember from previous hearings, I represent the
24 Lake Wylie community on York County Council. I've
25 been a resident of Lake Wylie for 29 years and

1 personally experienced life as a former Carolina
2 Water customer for 23 years.

3 I apologize for reading, but if I don't read,
4 we'll be here the rest of the night, so we're about
5 to wrap things up, so...

6 Allow me to take you back through multiple
7 increase requests over the past years. The Public
8 Service Commission has granted these increase
9 requests every time over many years, and it is
10 important to point out that York County did not
11 increase water rates from 2002 until 2016. The
12 approved increases should have resulted in profits
13 being allocated to infrastructure. We now pay
14 outrageous base rates for sewer and water.

15 This proposed increase is significant and
16 points to the gap in capital improvements that have
17 obviously been needed and ignored for a long time.
18 There is no excuse for the lack of commitment to
19 infrastructure, including a 250,000-gallon water
20 tank that is 750,000 gallons too small.

21 I'm going to present two things to you
22 tonight. I'm going to leave two things with you.
23 One is the visual inspection report that Carolina
24 Water Service had done in September 2018, after
25 taking over responsibility for the water tank. Had

1 they been keeping up with the pace of Lake Wylie,
2 there would already be a 1 million gallon tank
3 servicing the area. Instead, we have experienced
4 loss of water numerous times over the past year and
5 a half. Children have been dismissed from schools,
6 restaurants have been closed for extended times,
7 due to lack of water and boil-water advisories, and
8 families have had no access to water or sewer – a
9 service they pay exorbitant prices to ensure is
10 reliable.

11 Carolina Water Service failed the people of
12 Lake Wylie for many years by ignoring
13 infrastructure needs. Although they were allowed
14 to raise rates for infrastructure, they failed to
15 put money into infrastructure, leaving us with old
16 and insufficient pipes and short water supply.

17 Where did the increase in rates the Public
18 Service Commission granted go, over the past 27
19 years?

20 Blue Granite Water Company has identified the
21 same needs and is asking to be allowed to increase
22 rates again for the same capital costs that have
23 carried over from request to request. Again,
24 noting there was no increase to them in water cost
25 from York County in over 16 years.

1 Let's talk about customer service. From where
2 I sit, customer service has been great. I can call
3 the former and current area managers and get
4 something taken care of immediately. I'm not a
5 Blue Granite Water customer. So let me clarify
6 that when I'm making a call, I'm calling on behalf
7 of one of my constituents. My point is this –

8 [3-minute signal]

9 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Keep going.

10 **WITNESS:** Should I continue – I'm sorry.
11 Should I continue? Yes, I will continue.

12 [Laughter]

13 My point is this: Should a customer of a
14 utility company have to call their Council
15 representative to resolve a billing matter? This
16 occurs numerous times and, by their own admission
17 at a public community meeting last fall, Blue
18 Granite Water mentioned the lack of customer
19 service on their frontline. Lake Wylie is 28 years
20 into lackluster customer service by our water
21 provider.

22 You've seen and heard from my constituents
23 tonight. I want to be sure you identify with who
24 we are. Although we pay Kiawah Island resort
25 rates, we are far from being a resort area.

1 Although we have million-dollar lakefront homes on
2 the perimeter of our community, the majority of us
3 don't live in these homes, and these homes mostly
4 have well and septic, and are not provided water by
5 Blue Granite.

6 The core of this service area is a mix of
7 average-income hard-working people, with young
8 children, and retired folks who have moved here for
9 a better quality of life in their golden years. We
10 have mostly small, locally owned restaurants and
11 businesses struggling to pay the highest commercial
12 taxes in the country. Imagine the impact a day
13 without water has on us, let alone a few days.
14 Elderly retired people, children, and businesses
15 must know that the water company is capable of
16 providing water.

17 And I'm going to present to you – this is a
18 letter from Blue Granite Water, dated August 12,
19 2019, the same time their last rate increase was
20 scheduled to come before you. That request was
21 canceled – or should I say postponed. This letter
22 is addressed to York County Development Services
23 Manager and states that Blue Granite Water Company
24 has temporarily ceased providing willingness-and-
25 capability letters to – capability-to-serve letters

1 for new developments in the Lake Wylie area. I'm
2 all for growth management, but this is not how we
3 intend to manage it.

4 I guess it's hard to get a rate increase when
5 you can't provide water. Mind you, that was just a
6 short six months ago. What's happened in that last
7 six months? Blue Granite has made a connection to
8 Mecklenburg County and is currently getting a
9 million gallons of water a day from the North
10 Carolina side of Lake Wylie. Their intent is to
11 ultimately get 2 million gallons a day. This
12 connection was requested by York County in the new
13 agreement with Carolina Water Service/Blue Granite
14 Water Company as a backup in case of an emergency.
15 The connection to Charlotte literally buys this
16 for-profit water provider more time before they
17 have to invest in the million-dollar million-gallon
18 water tank for their own Lake Wylie customers.

19 It is my understanding that the water coming
20 from North Carolina is cheaper than the water
21 purchased from York County, and I have to wonder
22 where this factors into this rate increase. A
23 million to 2 million gallons a day and a deferred
24 water-tank investment sounds like a resulting
25 decrease in water for the people of Lake Wylie.

1 On behalf of Lake Wylie, thank you again for
2 listening. Someone has to hold this for-profit
3 company accountable. Without the oversight of the
4 Public Service Commission, I hate to imagine what
5 we would be paying for water and sewer service.
6 Our joint request of you tonight is that each of
7 you put yourselves in our shoes. Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Love.
9 Questions.

10 [Applause]

11 **MR. WELLBORN:** Mr. Chairman, I wasn't going to
12 dare interrupt Ms. Love, but York County is an
13 Intervenor in this case and has prefiled testimony
14 that's been introduced into the record as part of
15 the merits hearing. Before I learned that Ms. Love
16 was not a customer of Blue Granite, my plan was to
17 clarify that her comments tonight were in the
18 nature of public comment. Now I'm not sure if that
19 is correct. I would, therefore, like for the
20 record to reflect an objection from the company, to
21 the extent her statements are – could be construed
22 as testimony on behalf of York County. With great
23 respect. It's a procedural issue.

24 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you. We'll rule on
25 that in the final order.

1 **MR. WELLBORN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank
2 you, Ms. Love.

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Ms. Love, appreciate you
4 being here. And I just now got when you said we'll
5 start with love and finish with love.

6 **WITNESS:** Yes.

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Not real sharp at the end
8 of the night. Thank you so much.

9 **MR. RICHARDSON:** [Indicating.]

10 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Yes, sir.

11 **MR. RICHARDSON:** Do we want these shoes in as
12 an exhibit?

13 [Laughter]

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay. Okay. Thank you,
15 sir. We'll make those – no. Thank you.

16 We'd like to thank everyone for being here
17 tonight.

18 And you're going to leave –

19 **WITNESS:** I am. I made copies for everybody,
20 too, so...

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay. We'll mark that as
22 No. 48, and we'll rule on that in the final order.

23 [WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 48 was
24 marked for identification, with receipt
25 into evidence to be later ruled upon]

1 **MR. KENDREE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And,
2 Mr. Chairman, in response, I do believe the vast
3 majority, if not all the commentary, is public
4 record and public knowledge that Ms. Love was
5 commenting on as a resident of the Lake Wylie area.

6 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay, thank you. Okay.
7 We've got all that in?

8 We'd like to thank everyone for coming out
9 tonight. Appreciate your comments and appreciate
10 you taking your time on a rainy night. And with
11 that, we are adjourned.

12 [WHEREUPON, at 9:58 p.m., the hearing in
13 the above-entitled matter was adjourned.]

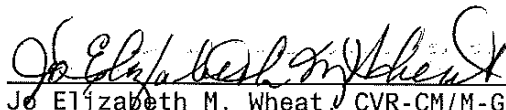
14 _____
15 [WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 43 was
16 marked and received in evidence.]
17 _____

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM-GNSC, Notary Public in and for the State of South Carolina, do hereby certify that the foregoing is, to the best of my skill and ability, a true and correct transcript of all the proceedings had and testimony adduced in a public evening hearing held in the above-captioned matter before the PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA;

That the witnesses appearing during said hearing were sworn or affirmed to state the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, on this the 30th day of December, 2020.


 Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM/M-GNSC
 Hearings Reporter, PSC/SC
 My Commission Expires: January 27, 2021.